

THE TWO BROTHERS

PIERRE ET JEAN

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BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

TRANSLATED BY ALBERT SMITH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

E. DUEZ AND A. LYNCH



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I



THE TWO BROTHERS

CHAPTER I

“ BOTHERATION ! ” cried old M. Roland, abruptly.

For a quarter of an hour he had stood motionless, with his eyes fixed on the water, every now and then quietly lifting his line, which was sunk to the bottom of the sea.

Madame Roland had fallen asleep at the back of the vessel, where she sat beside Madame Rosémilly, who had come on this fishing excursion as her guest. She raised herself, and turned to her husband.

“ Yes, G r me ; what is it ? ”

The angry old fellow replied :

“ I can’t get another bite. Since twelve o’clock I have caught nothing

One ought never to fish except in the company of men; women always make you late in starting."

His two sons, Pierre and Jean, who held lines wound round their forefingers, one to larboard and the other to starboard, laughed in unison; and Jean answered him :

" You are not very polite to our guest, father."

M. Roland was disconcerted, and made his excuses.

" I beg your pardon, Madame Rosémilly. That is the kind of man I am. I invite ladies because I like to be in their company, and then, when I feel the water under me, I think of nothing but the fish."

Madame Roland was now quite awake, and was looking with a softened expression at the wide stretch of cliffs and sea.

She murmured :

" You have had a fine haul, nevertheless."

Her husband shook his head in denial, at the same time glancing complacently at the basket where the fish which the three men had caught were still faintly quivering, with a pleasant sound of stiffening scales and starting fins, of weak and powerless efforts, and gasping in the deadly air.

M. Roland seized the basket between his knees, tilted it up, turned the stream of silver fish to the brim, in order to look at those beneath. Their palpitation increased, and the strong smell, full of the wholesome odour of sea-water, rose up from the well-packed creel.

The old fisherman eagerly inhaled it, as if he were taking in the scent of roses, and exclaimed :

" By Jove, they are sweet, and no mistake!"

Then he added :

" How many of these did you catch, doctor?"

His eldest son, Pierre, a man of thirty, with black whiskers cut like a magistrate's, and with shaved upper lip and chin, replied :

" Oh, very few. Three or four."

The father turned to his younger son :

" And you, Jean?"

Jean, who was a tall fair man, with a large beard, and much younger than his brother, smiled as he answered :

“ About as many as Pierre; say four or five.”

They always told the same tale, which delighted M. Roland.

He had wound his line round the thole of an oar, and, crossing his arms, exclaimed :

“ I shall never try to fish again after twelve. Even after ten it is too late. The beggars will not bite after that; they are basking in the sun!”

The worthy man surveyed the sea all round him with the contented air of a proprietor.

He was an old Parisian jeweller, whom an extravagant love of sailing and fishing had tempted from his shop as soon as his circumstances enabled him to live modestly on his income.

He had retired to Havre, bought a fishing boat, and become an amateur sailor. His two sons remained at Paris in order to complete their studies, and from time to time came down on a holiday, to share their father's pleasures.

Pierre, the eldest by five years, having when he left college felt a vocation for several professions one after another, had successively made trial of half a dozen, and, quickly disgusted with each, plunged without delay into new ambitions.

Finally medicine had allured him, and he had set to work with such good will that he had just received his diploma after a somewhat short course of study, and certain remissions of time which he had secured from the minister. He was enthusiastic, intellectual, changeable, and yet capable of tenacity, full of philosophical ideals and fancies.

Jean, who was as fair as his brother was dark, as calm as his brother was ardent, as gentle as his brother was bitter, had steadily gone through his course of legal study, and had just obtained his licentiate's diploma when Pierre was made a doctor.

They had come home for a little rest, and intended to settle in Havre, if they could do so to their satisfaction.

But a vague jealousy, one of those dormant jealousies which almost

insensibly grow up between brothers or sisters until they reach maturity, and come to a head when one of them marries or has a piece of good luck, kept them on the alert, in a brotherly and harmless antagonism. It was certain that they loved each other, but they watched one another narrowly. Pierre, five years old when Jean was born, had regarded with the hostility of a little spoiled animal the sudden appearance of this other little animal in the arms of his father and mother, so much caressed and loved by them.

Jean had been a pattern of gentleness, goodness, and equable temper from his infancy, and Pierre had gradually accustomed himself to hear the ceaseless puffing of the lad whose gentleness seemed to him to be effeminacy, his goodness simplicity, and his good-humour mere blindness. His parents, placid folk, who desired for their children honourable and moderate positions in life, reproached him for his indecision, his enthusiasm, his abortive attempts, and all his futile approximation to generous ideas and brilliant professions.

Since he became a man they no longer said to him : " Look at Jean, and imitate him ! " But, whenever he heard : " Jean has done so and so," he quite understood the meaning and allusion concealed beneath the words.

Their mother, a methodical woman, a somewhat sentimental and thrifty dame of the middle class, gifted with a tender yet prudent soul, was always soothing away the little rivalries which daily sprang up between her two great sons, out of all the trivialities of their life. At this time, moreover, a chance occurrence was disturbing her to a certain extent. During the winter she had made the acquaintance, whilst her sons were completing their several studies, of a neighbour, Madame Rosémilly, the widow of a sea-captain, who had died at sea two years before. The young widow, only twenty-three years old, a determined woman, whose knowledge of life came by instinct, as in an animal which has its liberty, as though she had seen, passed through, understood, and taken the measure of all that could possibly happen, judging all in a wholesome, limited, and kindly spirit, had got into the habit of coming to work and gossip in the evenings with the pleasant neighbours who were wont to give her a cup of tea.

M. Roland, whose mania for seamanship was always uppermost, used to ask their new friend about the deceased captain, and she would speak about him, about his voyages, his old yarns, without any difficulty, like a sensible and resigned lady who loves her life and has respect for death.

The two sons, on their return, finding this pretty widow installed in the house, had at once begun to pay her attentions, less from the desire to please her than from a wish to oust each other.

Their prudent and practical mother eagerly hoped that one of them would succeed, for the young widow was rich; but she would have been very glad if the other had proved to be indifferent.

Madame Rosémilly was fair, with blue eyes, with a crown of soft hair which fluttered at the lightest breath, and a little swaggering, bold, pugnacious manner, which was not at all in agreement with the methodical cleverness of her mind.

She soon appeared to prefer Jean, being drawn to him by the similarity of their natures. This preference, however, was displayed in a scarcely perceptible distinction of tone and glance, and in the fact that she occasionally took his advice.

She seemed to recognize that Jean's opinion would confirm her own, whilst Pierre's might well be adverse. When she spoke of the doctor's ideas, political, artistic, philosophical or moral, she would say : " Your crotchets." At such times he would look at her with the chill aspect of a magistrate who is conducting proceedings against a woman—against all women—the unfortunate sex!

Before the return of his sons, M. Roland had never invited her on his fishing excursions. He never even took his wife, for he liked to set out before daylight, with Captain Beausire, a retired captain who had made long voyages, whom he had met on the quay when the tide came in, until they became intimate friends, and the old sailor Papagris, nicknamed Jean-Bart, whom he had placed in charge of the boat.

One evening in the previous week, as Madame Rosémilly, who had been dining with them, expressed her opinion that fishing must be a pleasant occupation, the old jeweller, flattered on his weak side, and fired

with a wish to communicate his passion to another, and to make true believers after the fashion of the preachers, exclaimed :

“ Would you like to come ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! ”

“ Next Tuesday ? ”

“ Yes, on Tuesday next ! ”

“ Are you equal to setting out at five in the morning ? ”

She gave a cry of astonishment.

“ Oh, dear me, no ! ”

He was disappointed and chilled, and suddenly doubted whether she had a call in this direction. But still he asked her at what time she could leave.

“ Oh—— say at nine ! ”

“ Not before ? ”

“ No, not before. Even that is very early. ”

The worthy man hesitated. They would certainly catch nothing, for if the sun grows hot the fish cease to bite ; but the two brothers were eager to arrange the party, to plan and settle everything before they separated.

Accordingly on the following Tuesday the *Perle* had cast anchor under the white rocks of cape La Hève ; and they had fished till midday, then dozed, then fished again, catching nothing ; and M. Roland, finding soon afterwards that Madame Rosémilly as a matter of fact only cared for sailing, and perceiving that his lines were agitated no longer, had, in a thoughtless fit of impatience, uttered the energetic—“ Botheration ! ” which was addressed quite as much to the indifferent widow as to the elusive fish.

Now he was gazing at his haul with the trembling joy of a miser. Then he raised his eyes to the sky, and observed that the sun was sinking.

“ Well, my lads,” he said, “ shall we stand in a bit ? ”

They drew in their lines, wound them up, stuck their cleaned hooks in the corks, and stood ready.

Roland had risen to study the horizon like a captain.



“ There is no wind left,” he said; “ we must row, boys!”

And suddenly, pointing towards the north, he added :

“ Stay a minute. There is the Southampton boat.”

Over the level sea, stretched out like a vast blue glittering cloth, with streaks of gold and of fire, a black cloud arose where he pointed, on the rose-tinted sky. And underneath the cloud appeared the vessel, which at that distance looked a speck.

Round to the south were other smokes, many in number, all converging to the pier of Havre, whose white line it was difficult to make out, with its lighthouse, standing like a horn upon the extremity.

Roland asked :

“ Is not the *Normandie* due to-day?”

“ Yes, father,” said Jean.

“ Give me my glass. I think that is she, out yonder.”

The good man opened his copper tube, fixed it to his eye, made out the spot, and suddenly, delighted to have seen it, cried :

“ Ay, ay, that is she. I know her by the two funnels. Will you look, Madame Rosémilly?”

She took the instrument, which she pointed towards the steamer, probably without getting it within range, for she could distinguish nothing, nothing except a blue circle, with a coloured ring, a circular rainbow, and after that sundry odd spectacles, as it were eclipses, which made her heart jump.

As she returned the telescope she said :

“ I must tell you all the same that I never knew how to use that instrument. It used to trouble my husband, who would stand for hours at the windows, looking at the passing ships.”

M. Roland replied, with some annoyance :

“ It must be due to a defect in your eye, for my glass is an excellent one——”

Then he offered it to his wife.

“ Will you have a look?”

“ No, thanks, I know beforehand that I should not be able to see.”

Madame Roland, who was a woman of forty-eight, though she did not

look it, appeared to enjoy the sail and the evening more than any one else.

Her chestnut hair was just beginning to turn. She had a calm and sensible look, a happy and kindly appearance, which were good to see. As her son Pierre said, she knew the value of money, which did not prevent her from indulging in dreams. She loved reading, romance, and poetry, not for their artistic value, but for the melancholy and tender fancies which they awoke in her. Some verse or other, often commonplace, often trashy, made the finer string vibrate, as she would say, and gave her the sensation of a mysterious desire all but realised. And she took delight in these delicate emotions, which somewhat disturbed a mind otherwise as well regulated as an account-book.

Since coming to Havre she had grown perceptibly stouter, and her once very supple and slender figure had become somewhat more portly.

This sea-trip had delighted her. Her husband, who was not ill-natured, domineered over her as the despots of the counter, with whom a command implies strong language, are wont to domineer, without anger or ill-will. Before strangers he held himself in check, but in the family circle he gave way to his mood, and assumed terrible airs, though he was in fear of everybody. She, through dread of noise, scenes, and useless explanations, always yielded, and made no demands; so that for a long time past she had not ventured to ask Roland to go out for a sail. Thus she had joyfully seized this opportunity, and she appreciated the rare and novel pleasure.

As soon as they set out she gave herself up completely, mind and body, to the gentle gliding motion over the waves. She was not thinking; she did not meander amidst recollections or hopes; it seemed as though her soul was floating, like her body, over a soft, flowing, delicious stream, which cradled and lulled her.

When M. Roland gave orders to return, crying: "Now then, take your places for a row!" she smiled as she saw her sons, her two big sons, throw off their jackets and turn up the sleeves of their shirts.

Pierre, who was nearest to the two women, took the starboard thwart, and Jean the other, waiting for the "Row on, all!" of the skipper—for he made a point of having every detail punctiliously carried out.

Both together, with a simultaneous effort, they dropped their oars into the water, then swung themselves back, and pulled with all their might; and they vied with each other to display their strength. They had come out quietly under sail, but the breeze had fallen, and the manly pride of the brothers was suddenly stimulated by the prospect of measuring their strength.

When they went fishing alone with their father, they rowed thus with nobody at the rudder, for Roland used to be preparing his lines, keeping an eye on the handling of the boat, which he would direct by a gesture or a word—"Easy, Jean!"—or "Put it on, Pierre!"—or "Now then, bow! Put it on, stroke! A little more elbow-grease." Thus the one who was dreaming pulled stronger, and he who was running away with the stroke slackened down, and the boat righted herself.

To-day they were going to show off their biceps. Pierre's arms were hairy, somewhat thin, but sinewy; those of Jean were thick and white, with a tinge of pink, and a mass of muscles under the skin.

Pierre had the advantage at first. With his clenched teeth, knitted brow, outstretched limbs, hands grasping the oar, he made it bend again at every stroke, and the *Perle* shot in towards the coast. The father, seated in the bows, so that he might leave the stern-seat for the two women, exhausted himself with crying: "Gently, stroke! Put it on, bow!" Stroke redoubled his energy, and bow could not respond to this ill-regulated pace.

At last the skipper cried: "Easy all!" The two blades were raised simultaneously, and Jean, at his father's bidding, pulled alone for a few seconds. But from this time the advantage was with him. He took fresh life, and warmed to his work, whilst Pierre, out of breath, exhausted by his vigorous exertion, grew weak, and panted. Four times running M. Roland eased them in order to enable the eldest to get his breath, and to dress the boat, which was standing out to sea. Then the doctor, his brow covered with perspiration, his cheeks pale, angry and humiliated, stammered out:

"I don't know what's the matter with me. I have a spasm in the

heart. I started off all right, but this has taken it out of my arms."

"Shall I scull?" Jean asked him.

"Thanks, no; it will pass off."

The mother said with some annoyance :

"What is the sense, Pierre, of working yourself into such a state? You are no longer a child!"

He raised his shoulders, and went on rowing.

Madame Rosémilly pretended not to see, or understand, or hear. Her fair little head thrown back at every movement of the boat, with a sharp and captivating jerk, which tossed the soft hair on her temples.

But the father exclaimed : "Look out! The *Prince Albert* is running us down!" Every one looked at the steamer. The long, low Southampton boat, with her two funnels sloping backwards, and her two yellow paddle-boxes, round like two cheeks—the Southampton boat was coming up at full steam, laden with passengers under their open umbrellas. Her rushing, noisy bows, cutting the water until it fell again in foam, made her seem twice as speedy as she was, like an express-boat; and the upright bows, as they cut the sea, raised two thin transparent sheets of water which glided along the vessel's sides.

When it was quite close to the *Perle*, Roland raised his hat, and the two ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and half a dozen umbrellas responded to these salutations, leaning eagerly over the sides of the steamer which passed on its way, leaving behind it a few slackening waves.

They saw other ships as well, wreathed in the same way with smoke, hurrying in from all points of the horizon to the short white jetty, which sucked them in one after another like a mouth. And the fishing boats and the big sailing vessels with their slender masts gliding through the blue, towed by tugs which could hardly be discerned, converged more or less rapidly towards this devouring monster, which from time to time looked as if it had been gorged, and shot out to the open sea another fleet of packets, brigs, schooners, three-masters laden as with a maze of tree-tops. The hurrying steamers dispersed to the right and left, or into the level surface of the ocean; and the sailing vessels, quitted

by the tugs which had brought them in, rode motionless, whilst they were being covered from mainsail to top-mast with white or brown canvas, which glowed red in the setting sun.

Madame Roland, looking around her with half-closed eyes, murmured :

“ Ah, this sea! How beautiful it is! ”

Madame Rosémilly answered her, with a long-drawn sigh, which had nothing sad about it :

“ Yes! But it is very cruel sometimes. ”

“ Look, ” cried M. Roland, “ there is the *Normandie*, just going to enter. What a fine ship, eh? ”

Then he pointed out the features of the coast in front of them, from the other side of the estuary of the Seine—twenty kilometres across, as he told them. He showed them Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the river of Caen, and the rocks of Calvados, which make navigation dangerous as far as Cherbourg. Next he spoke of the Seine sands, which alter their form with every tide, and even puzzle the pilots of Quillebœuf, if they do not trace out the channel every day. He showed them how the port of Havre divides the low from the high part of Normandy. In lower Normandy the flat coast runs down to the sea in pasture land, meadows, and fields. That of higher Normandy, on the other hand, is perpendicular, a vast cliff, scarped, jagged, magnificent, constituting an immense white wall, in which every indentation conceals a village or a harbour, Étretat, Fécamp, Saint-Valery, Tréport, Dieppe, etc.

The two women were not listening, for they were absorbed in their happiness, moved by the spectacle of the ocean, covered with ships which darted about like animals around their den. They were silent, being overwhelmed by the vast horizon of air and water, reduced to stillness by the soothing and splendid sunset. Roland alone continued to talk. He was one of those whom nothing can disturb. Women, with more delicate nerves, are conscious now and then, hardly knowing why, that the sound of a futile voice can be as irritating as an act of coarseness.

Pierre and Jean, restored to calmness, rowed slowly, and the *Perte*, a speck amongst the big vessels, was nearing the port.

When she touched the quay, Papagris, who was waiting for her, took the hands of the ladies to help them ashore; and they entered the town. A numerous and quiet crowd, the sort of crowd which daily frequents the piers at full tide, was returning at the same time.

Madame Roland and Madame Rosémilly walked in front, followed by the three men. As they climbed the Rue de Paris they stopped now and again before a milliner's or a goldsmith's shop, to look at a bonnet or a jewel; then, after comparing notes, they passed on again.

Opposite to the Place de la Bourse, Roland, as was his daily custom, stood gazing at the Commercial Dock, crowded with ships, and continued by other docks, where the great hulls, side by side, touched each other in four or five rows. Their countless masts, for a length of several kilometres of wharves, with their yards, spars, and rigging, gave to this channel in the heart of the town the appearance of a great dead forest. And above this leafless forest the sea-gulls hovered, waiting to swoop down like a falling stone upon the remnants cast into the water; and a sailor lad, who was securing a pulley at the end of a mast-head, seemed as though he had climbed there to look for birds' nests.

"Will you dine with us, without ceremony, that we may finish the day together?" Madame Roland asked her friend.

"Oh, yes, with pleasure! I accept without ceremony also. It would be melancholy to go home alone this evening."

Pierre, who had heard this, and whom the indifference of Madame Rosémilly was beginning to chill, muttered: "Good! The widow sticks to us." For some days past he had been calling her "the widow." This word, though it said nothing, annoyed Jean by the tone in which it was said, for it seemed to him ill-natured and offensive.

The three men did not speak again till they came to their own doorstep. The house was narrow, made up of a ground floor and two low stories, in the Rue Belle-Normande. The maid, Joséphine, a girl of nineteen, a cheap country servant, who had in full measure the stony and sheepish look of the peasantry, opened and closed the door, going up behind the family to the little drawing-room on the first floor.



Then she said : “ There has been a gentleman come three times ! ”

M. Roland, who rarely spoke to her without shouting or swearing, exclaimed :

“ Who has come three times—deuce take the girl ? ”

She never troubled herself about her master's voice; so she went on :

“ Gentleman from the notary.”

“ What notary ? ”

“ Why, M'sieu Canu.”

“ And what did the gentleman say ? ”

“ That M'sieu Canu would come here himself this evening.”

M. Lecanu was Roland's notary, and in a sense his friend, managing his affairs for him. As he had given notice of his evening visit, he must have some urgent and important business, and the Rolands looked at each other, in some anxiety at the news, as moderately well-to-do people are wont to be at every appearance of a notary, which raises a crowd of ideas as to contracts, inheritances, trials, matters agreeable or alarming. The father of the family, after a short silence, muttered :

“ What on earth can he have to say ? ”

Madame Rosémilly began to laugh.

“ Come now! this is a legacy. I am sure of it; I bring good luck.”

But they were not expecting the death of any one who could leave them anything.

Madame Roland, who was endowed with an excellent memory for relatives, began to run over all the connections on her husband's side and on her own, to follow up all the descents, and to trace the cousinships.

Without having so much as taken off her bonnet, she asked :

“ Tell me, father ”—she called her husband “ father ” at home, and occasionally “ M. Roland ” before strangers—“ tell me, father, do you remember who married Joseph Lebru, after his first wife ? ”

“ Yes, a little Dnnénil girl, daughter of a stationer.”

“ Were there any children ? ”

“ I should think there were. Four or five, at least.”

“ Oh, then there's nothing from that quarter ! ”

She was thenceforth immersed in this quest. She clung to the hope of good fortune falling from heaven upon them. But Pierre, who loved his mother very much, who knew that she was somewhat imaginative, and dreaded a disillusion for her, a small vexation and sorrow, if the news should be bad instead of good, checked her.

"Don't run away with an idea, mamma; uncles from America have gone out. I rather think it is about a marriage for Jean."

Everybody was taken aback by this notion, and Jean was rather annoyed that his brother should have said such a thing before Madame Rosémilly.

"Why for me more than for you? The idea is very unlikely. You are the oldest, so that people must have thought of you first. And, besides, I don't want to marry."

Pierre snapped him up.

"You are in love then?"

Jean replied, out of humour :

"Must you be in love to say you don't want to marry yet?"

"Ah, the 'yet' alters the matter. You are waiting your time."

"Say I am waiting, if you like."

But M. Roland, who had been listening and thinking, suddenly hit upon the most likely idea.

"By Jove! We are very stupid to be racking our brains! M. Lecanu is our friend. He knows that Pierre is looking for a doctor's connection, and Jean for a lawyer's, and he has met with a chance of settling one of you."

It was so simple and probable that every one agreed about it.

"Dinner's ready," said the maid.

They went to their rooms to wash their hands before sitting down.

Ten minutes later they were dining on the ground floor.

At first there was hardly any conversation, but after a time Roland was puzzling himself over the notary's visit.

"Now, why did he not write? Why did he send his clerk three times? Why is he coming himself?"

Pierre thought that natural enough.

"No doubt he wants an immediate answer. Perhaps he has confi-

dential conditions to tell us of, such as one does not care to write."

But all four were preoccupied, and rather put out at having invited a stranger, who would interfere with their discussion.

They had just returned to the drawing-room when the notary was announced. Roland jumped up.

" Good day, my dear Maître."

He gave M. Lecanu the title of " Maître," which is prefixed to the name of all notaries.

Madame Rosémilly rose.

" I must go. I feel very tired."

They made a feeble attempt to keep her, but she would not be persuaded, and went away without either of the men escorting her, as their custom was.

Madame Roland bustled up to the visitor :

" A cup of coffee, Monsieur? "

" Thank you, no. I have just had my dinner."

" A cup of tea then? "

" I will not refuse—but by and by. First we must talk business."

In the profound silence which followed these words, nothing was heard but the regular swinging of the pendulum, and on the floor below, the noise of the dishes as they were being washed by the maid—who was too stupid even to listen at doors. Then the notary continued :

" Did you know at Paris a certain M. Maréchal—Léon Maréchal? "

M. Roland and his wife uttered the same exclamation.

" Indeed we did! "

" He was a friend of yours? "

Roland exclaimed :

" The best of friends, sir, but an obstinate Parisian; he never quits the Boulevard. He is head of a department at the Treasury. I have never seen him since I left the capital. And then we ceased to write to each other. When we live at a distance, you see—"

The notary gravely added :

" M. Maréchal is dead! "

Husband and wife made the same little movement of surprise and sorrow, real or feigned, but always quick, with which one generally receives such news.

M. Lecanu went on :

“My colleague in Paris has just informed me of the chief disposition of his will, by which he constitutes your son Jean, M. Jean Roland, his sole heir.”

The astonishment was so great that no one had a word to say.

Madame Roland was the first to get the better of her emotion, and murmured :

“ Oh, dear, poor Léon! Our poor friend—dear, dear!—— He is dead!”

There were tears in her eyes, silent, womanly tears, tears of grief, rising from the soul, and trickling down the cheeks, which seem so charged with sorrow, and are so transparent.

But Roland thought less of the sadness of this loss than of the hope which had been born in him. He dare not, however, ask at once about the conditions of the will, or the amount of the fortune. But to get nearer to the interesting subject, he asked :

“ What was the cause of poor Maréchal’s death?”

M. Lecanu had no idea.

“ All I know,” he said, “ is that, dying without direct heirs, he leaves the whole of his fortune, twenty thousand francs a year in the Three per Cents, to your second son, whom he saw growing up from his birth, and whom he considers worthy of this bequest. In case M. Jean should not accept it, the inheritance would pass to the Foundlings.”

M. Roland could no longer hide his joy, and cried :

“By Jupiter, that was a kind thought! I am sure, if I had had no children, I should not have forgotten that dear friend of mine!”

The notary smiled.

“ I have been very glad,” he said, “ to tell you this myself. It always gives one pleasure to bring people good news.”

He had not so much as thought that this good news was the death



of a friend, Roland's best friend, who had himself just forgotten in an instant the friendship which he had previously declared so emphatically.

Madame Roland and her sons still looked sad. She continued to weep a little, drying her eyes with her handkerchief, which she pressed to her lips in order to keep back her deep sighs.

The doctor murmured :

“ He was a good fellow, and very affectionate. He used frequently to invite my brother and me to dinner.”

Jean, with wide open and shining eyes, held his light beard with his right hand—a familiar trick—and passed it through to the end of the hair, as if to lengthen and soften it.

Twice he parted his lips, in order to add a becoming phrase, and, after searching for one a long time, could only say :

“ Truly, he was very fond of me. He always embraced me when I went to see him.”

But the father's thoughts were running far ahead; they ran all round the inheritance which had been announced to them, which was already secured—this money waiting at the door, ready to enter, to-morrow, as soon as it was accepted.

“ There is no chance of impediment?” he asked, “ no lawsuit?—no contesting?”

M. Lecanu appeared to be free from anxiety.

“ No; my Paris colleague describes the position of affairs as very simple. All we want is M. Jean's formal acceptance.”

“ Then it is perfectly straight. And this fortune is unencumbered?”

“ Quite unencumbered.”

“ All formalities observed?”

“ All.”

Suddenly the retired jeweller was a little ashamed, vaguely, instinctively, momentarily ashamed of his hurry to learn the particulars, and he continued :

“ You quite understand that if I have asked at once about all these matters, it is to save my son from troubles which he might not have

foreseen. Sometimes there are debts, a complicated state of affairs, Heaven knows what! And then it is like plunging into a maze of brambles. In short, I am not the heir, but I think of the child before all."

They always called Jean "the child" at home, though he was much taller than Pierre.

Madame Roland seemed to be waking from a dream, and recalling a far-away, almost forgotten circumstance, which she had heard in other days, and of which she was not quite assured. She suddenly stammered out :

"Were you not saying that our poor Maréchal had left his fortune to my little Jean?"

"Yes, Madame."

Then she went on, ingenuously :

"This is a great pleasure to me, for it proves that he loved us."

Roland had risen to his feet.

"Do you wish, my dear Maitre, that my son should sign his acceptance at once?"

"No, no, M. Roland. To-morrow; to-morrow in my office, at two o'clock, if that is convenient."

"Oh, yes, of course, it will be convenient!"

Then Madame Roland, who had also risen, and who was smiling after her tears, took two steps to the notary, rested her hand on the back of his chair, and looking at him with the tender aspect of a grateful mother, said :

"And now for that cup of tea, M. Lecanu?"

"Now I shall be very glad of it, Madame."

The maid, being summoned, brought in the first place some dry biscuits in deep tin boxes—those stale and brittle English biscuits, which seem as if they had been baked to suit the beaks of parrots, and soldered up in metal boxes for a voyage round the world. Then she went in search of some unbleached napkins, folded in little squares—tea-napkins, which are rarely washed in poor households. She returned a third time with the sugar-basin and the cups. Then she went off to boil the water. And then they waited.

Nobody could speak; they had too much to think about, and nothing to say. Madame Roland alone tried to utter trivial phrases. She described the fishing excursion, sang the praises of the *Perle*, and of Madame Rosémilly.

"Delightful, very delightful," said the notary from time to time.

Roland, leaning with his back against the chimney-piece, as a man leans in winter, when there is a fire in the grate, with his hands in his pockets, and his lips pursed as if to whistle, could not keep still, tortured by an overmastering desire to give rein to his joy.

The two brothers, in two similar arm-chairs, with their legs crossed in the same fashion, right and left of the centre table, were staring fixedly in front of them. Their attitudes were the same, but the expression was very different.

At length the tea made its appearance. The notary took a cup, sweetened and drank it, after softening a little biscuit too hard to be bitten. Then he got up, shook hands, and departed.

"It is understood, then," Roland reminded him, "to-morrow at two."

"Yes, it is understood; two, to-morrow."

Jean had not said a word.

After he had gone, there was silence again. Then Roland came and slapped his hand on his younger son's shoulder, and cried :

"Well, you lucky rascal, you don't embrace me?"

Jean smiled, and embraced his father, saying :

"It did not occur to me as necessary!"

But the old fellow could no longer restrain his merry humour. He walked about, played the piano on the furniture with his clumsy fingers, balanced himself on his toes, and kept on saying :

"What luck! What luck! Here's a stroke of luck!"

Pierre asked him a question.

"You knew this Maréchal very well, then, in old days?"

The father answered :

"Why, you see, he used to spend every evening at our house. But you remember that he used to fetch you from college, when you had

a holiday, and often took you back after dinner. Ah, I recollect, on the very day of Jean's birth it was he who went for the doctor. He had been dining with us when your mother was taken ill, and set off at a run. In his hurry he took my hat instead of his own. I remember that, because we had a hearty laugh over it, later on. Perhaps he recalled this detail on his death-bed, and as he had no heir of his own, he said : 'Happy thought! I had a hand in the birth of that youngster, and I will leave him my money!'"

Madame Roland, buried in her low chair, seemed to have been lost in her recollections.

She murmured now, like one thinking aloud :

"Oh, he was a good friend, devoted, faithful, a man in a thousand in these days!"

Jean had risen.

"I'm going for a walk," he said.

His father was astonished, and tried to detain him; for they must talk things over, make their plans, and form their decisions. But the young man was obstinate, and pretended that he had an engagement. Besides, there would be plenty of time to arrive at an understanding before they came into the inheritance.

So he went off; for he wanted to be alone and think. Pierre, in his turn, declared that he was going out, and after a few minutes he followed his brother.

As soon as he was alone with his wife, M. Roland seized her in his arms, kissed her twice on each cheek, and, by way of answer to a reproach which she often launched at him, said :

"You see, my love, that it would have done me no good to stay in Paris any longer, to drudge for the children, instead of coming here and setting up my health; for good luck falls on us from the skies."

She had become quite serious now.

"It falls from the skies for Jean," she said. "But, Pierre?"

"Pierre! Oh, he is a doctor, and will make money. And then his brother is sure to do something for him."

“No; he would not accept it. And then, this legacy is Jean’s—only Jean’s. Pierre is placed at a great disadvantage by this.”

The good man was perplexed.

“Then we will leave him a little more in my will.”

“No, that is not just either!”

“Bother take it, then!” he cried. “What would you have me do? You are always on the look-out for unpleasant ideas. You must spoil all my pleasures. There, I am going to bed. Good night. All the same this is a stroke of luck, a famous stroke!”

And he departed, overjoyed in spite of all, and without a word of regret for the generous friend who was no more.

Madame Roland resumed her reverie, beside the smouldering lamp.



II



CHAPTER II.

As soon as he was outside, Pierre turned his steps towards the Rue de Paris, the main street of Havre, which was lighted up, animated, noisy. The fresh breeze by the sea-side fanned his face, and he walked slowly with his cane under his arm, and his hands behind his back.

He felt ill at ease, depressed, dissatisfied, as one feels when one has heard a piece of bad news. No definite thought afflicted him, and he would have been at a loss to say at once how this heaviness of soul and numbness of body had fallen upon him. He was wrong somewhere, without knowing where; he had a little centre of pain, one of those almost insensible wounds which we cannot localise, but which trouble us, weary, sadden, irritate us; a strange, light suffering, as it were a germ of sorrow.

When he reached the Place du Théâtre, he was attracted by the lights of the Café Tortoni, and strolled slowly to the illuminated *façade*; but, as

he was about to enter, he thought that he would be sure to find friends and acquaintances there, with whom he would have to talk; and a prompt repugnance came upon him against this petty comradeship of small cups and half-glasses. Therefore, retracing his steps, he followed the main street leading to the port.

"Where shall I go?" he asked himself, looking about for a place to his mind, in keeping with his present mood. He could not find one, for he longed to be alone, and did not want to meet any one.

Coming to the great quay, he hesitated again, and then turned towards the pier. He had made up his mind for solitude.

As he brushed up against a bench on the breakwater, he sat down, already tired of walking, and disgusted with his walk before he had taken it.

"What is the matter with me?" he asked himself. And he searched his memory for any vexation which might have occurred to him, as one questions a sick person to find out the reason for his disorder.

His mind was at the same time excitable and prudent; he rushed into a business, and then began to reason, approving or condemning his impulse; but with him the original disposition was strongest in the end, and the man of sentiment prevailed over the intellectual man.

So he sought for the origin of this disturbance of nerve, this craving for motion without any particular wish, this desire to meet some one in order to change the current of his mind, and again this distaste for those he was likely to meet, and for the things they were likely to say to him.

Then he put to himself this question: Could Jean's legacy be the cause?

Well, that was possible, after all.

When the notary had announced the news, he had felt his heart beat a little faster. Certainly we are not always our own masters, and we are subject to spontaneous and persistent emotions, against which we strive in vain.

He began to reflect deeply on this physiological problem of the impressions produced by some event on a creature of instinct, and forming

within him a current of ideas and sensations, whether painful or pleasant, different from those which the man of reflection, who has mastered himself by the culture of his intellect, desires, or summons up, or deems good and wholesome.

He tried to conceive the state of mind of a son who inherits a large fortune, who by its aid is about to enjoy many pleasures which he has long desired—which had been forbidden by the avarice of a father, who was still loved and regretted.

He got up and began to walk again towards the end of the pier. He felt better, content with having understood, having detected himself, and stripped the veil from that second self which there is in all of us. "So I have been jealous of Jean," he thought. "That is mean enough, truly! I am sure of it now, because the first idea which entered my mind was that of his marriage to Madame Rosémilly. And yet I don't care for that little calculating coquette, just cut out to disenchant one with common sense and prudence. So it was groundless jealousy, jealousy in the abstract, with no reason for its existence. I must be on my guard against that!"

He reached the signal-post which shows the height of the water in the harbour, and lighted a match in order to read the list of ships signalled in the open, which were to enter at the next high tide. Steamers were expected from Brazil, La Plata, Chili, and Japan, two Danish brigs, a Norwegian schooner, and a Turkish steam-packet—which surprised Pierre almost as much as if he had read "a Swiss steamer"—and he saw, as it were, in a sort of absurd dream, a big ship laden with turbaned men, climbing the rigging in their baggy trousers.

"Stupid," he thought. "The Turks are sailors all the same."

After taking a few more steps, he paused to look round on the roadstead. On the right, under Sainte-Adresse, the two electric lights of Cape la Hève, like two monstrous twin Cyclops, threw their long and powerful glances across the sea. The two parallel rays, pouring from two neighbouring lanterns, like the vast tails of two comets, descended by a straight and regular slope from the summit of the coast to the extremity of the

horizon. Then two other lights from the two piers, the children of these giants, indicated the entrance to the harbour; and below, on the other bank of the Seine, others were to be seen, many others, fixed or revolving, flashing and eclipsing, opening and closing like eyes—the eyes of the several ports, yellow, red, green, watching the dark ocean covered with ships, the living eyes of the hospitable land, saying, if only by the unvarying and regular mechanic motion of their eyelids :

“ Here I am. I am Trouville, I am Honfleur, I am the estuary of Pont-Audemer. ”

And towering over all the rest, so high that one might take it, at such a distance, for a planet, the lofty light of Étouville showed the channel to Rouen, through the sand-banks in the estuary of the mighty river.

Then again, on the deep water, the limitless water, more gloomy than the sky, he fancied that he saw other stars, sprinkled about. They trembled in the haze of night, small, whether near or far off, white, green, and red. Almost all of them were motionless; yet some appeared to move. These were the lights of the ships at anchor, awaiting the tide, or of moving ships, which were making for an anchorage.

Just at this moment the moon rose behind the town; and she looked like a vast divine Canopus, lit up in the firmament to guide the innumerable fleet of the actual stars.

Pierre murmured, almost aloud :

“ Ah ! And we put ourselves about for the sake of twopence ! ”

Suddenly, close to him, in the broad black channel between the piers, a shadow, an enormous and fantastic shadow, glided by. Leaning over the parapet of granite, he saw a fishing boat which was returning to port, without a sound from voice, or wave, or oar, gently propelled by its high brown sail, spread to catch the breeze from the open sea.

He thought : “ If one could only live on that sea, how calmly one might live ! ”

And then, after a few more steps, he became aware of a man seated at the end of the jetty.

A dreamer, a lover, a sage—happy or sorrowful ? Who was it ? He



approached, curious to see the face of the solitary; and he recognized his brother.

“Why, is it you, Jean?”

“Why, Pierre! What are you come here for?”

“I am having a blow. And you?”

Jean burst out laughing.

“I am having a blow likewise.”

Pierre sat by his brother's side.

“Is not that a splendid sight?”

“It is.”

By the sound of his voice he understood that Jean had not been looking. He went on :

“For my part, when I come here I have a mad wish to go away, to set off with all these ships, northward or southward. Fancy! Those little lights below us have come from all quarters of the world, from countries with magnificent flowers and lovely girls, white or brown, from the countries of the humming-birds, the elephants, lions at liberty, negroes who are kings, from all the lands which are fairy tales to us who believe no longer in the White Cat or the Sleeping Beauty. It would be wonderfully nice, if one could afford to make a journey to those places; but it would mean a lot of money——”

He was suddenly silent, remembering that his brother had it now, the money he spoke of, and that he, delivered from all anxiety, from daily toil, a free man without fetters, rich and happy, could go where his fancy led him, to the pale-faced Swedish beauties, or to the brown Havannah girls.

Then one of those involuntary thoughts, which were frequent with him, so sudden and swift that he could not foresee them, nor arrest, nor qualify them, which seemed to come from another soul, independent of himself and full of violence, flashed upon him.

“Bah! He is too stupid! He will marry the little Rosémilly.”

He had risen to his feet.

“I will leave you to dream of the future. I want to walk.”

He grasped his brother's hand, and went on in hearty tones :

“ Well, my little Jean, and so you are a rich man. I am very glad that I met you alone to-night, that I may say how pleased I am, how I wish you joy—and how I love you.”

Jean, with his soft and tender nature, was much moved, and stammered out :

“ Thanks, thanks, my good Pierre. Thanks ! ”

And Pierre went slowly back again, his cane under his arm, and his hands behind him.

When he came back to the town he asked himself again what he should do, not satisfied with his own interrupted walk, and vexed at having been deprived of the sea by his brother's presence.

He had a sudden inspiration—“ I will go and drink a glass with old Marowsko.” So he climbed up towards the Ingouville quarter.

He had known Marowsko in the hospitals at Paris. He was an old Pole, a political refugee, so it was said, who had a terrible history, and had come to Paris after submitting to fresh examinations, to practise as a dispenser. Nothing was known of his past life; but there had been legends afloat amongst the house-surgeons, the students, and later on amongst the neighbours. His reputation as a dire conspirator, a nihilist, a regicide, a patriot who was ready for any fate, who had escaped death by a miracle, had fascinated the wild and lively imagination of Pierre Roland, and he had contracted a friendship with the old Pole, though without getting from him a single admission on the subject of his former existence. And, in fact, it was through the young doctor that this worthy had come and settled in Havre, reckoning on a good connection which the aforesaid doctor was to find for him.

Meanwhile he was living in poverty in his modest apothecary's shop, selling drugs to the poor shopkeepers and working men of the quarter.

Pierre would often go to see him after dinner, and to chat for an hour to him, for he loved the calm face and rare conversation of Marowsko, whose long silences he considered specially profound.

A single jet of gas was burning above the counter laden with phials. Those in front of the shop had not been lighted, on the score of economy.

Behind this counter, seated on a chair, with his legs stretched out, one over the other, an old bald-headed man, having a large beak of a nose, in a line with his narrow forehead, giving him the melancholy appearance of a parrot, was fast asleep with his chin upon his breast.

At the sound of the bell he awoke, rose up, and recognizing the doctor, came up to him with outstretched hands.

His black coat, spotted with stains of acids and syrups, much too large for his thin, short body, looked like a venerable cassock; and the man spoke with a strong Polish accent, which gave his rapid speech an infantine expression, a lisp and intonations like those of a child just beginning to pronounce.

Pierre sat down, and Marowsko asked him :

“What is there new, my dear doctor?”

“Nothing. Still the same thing everywhere.”

“You do not look cheerful, to-night.”

“I am not often cheerful.”

“Come, come! You must drive that away. Will you have a glass of liqueur?”

“That is just what I should like.”

“Then I will let you taste a new preparation. For two months I have been trying to get something from the currant, from which they have hitherto made nothing but a syrup! Well! I have invented a good liqueur—very good, very good!”

In great glee he went to a cupboard, opened it, and took out a phial, with which he returned. He moved with brief gestures, never prolonged; he did not extend his arm to its full length, nor spread his legs wide, nor make any complete and definite movement. His ideas were like his actions; he indicated them, foreshadowed, sketched, and suggested them, but did not give them full utterance.

The greatest concern of his life seemed, indeed, to be the preparation of syrups and liqueurs. With a good syrup or a good liqueur one could make a fortune, he used to say.

He had invented hundreds of sweet concoctions without succeeding in

putting one on the market. Pierre declared that Marowsko made him think of Marat.

Two little glasses were brought from the shop parlour, and placed on the mixing slab; and then the two men raised the liqueur to the gas, and observed its colour.

"What a lovely ruby!" cried Pierre.

"Is it not?"

The old Pole with his parrot's head seemed enchanted.

The doctor tasted, smacked his lips, reflected, tasted again, again reflected, and then said:

"Capital, capital, and quite a new flavour; a regular discovery, my dear fellow."

"Truly? Then I am very glad."

Marowsko asked Pierre's advice as to how he should name the new liqueur; he suggested "essence of currant," or "fine groseille," or "gro-sélia," or else "groséline."

Pierre did not care for any of these names.

An idea struck the old man.

"What you said just now was very good—'Lovely ruby.'"

The doctor doubted the value of this name also, although he had hit upon it. He recommended "groseillette," which Marowsko declared to be admirable.

Then they were silent, and remained seated for a few minutes, without saying a word, under the solitary gas jet.

At last Pierre said, almost against his will:

"Look here; a rather curious thing happened to us to-night. One of my father's friends has died, and left his fortune to my brother."

The dispenser seemed not to understand at once, but, after thinking about it, he hoped the doctor would come in for half. When the matter had been thoroughly explained, he appeared surprised and angry; and, by way of expressing his dissatisfaction at seeing his young friend sacrificed, he repeated several times:

"That will not look well."

Pierre, whose nervous fit was coming on again, wanted to know what Marowsko meant by this expression.

“Why would it not look well? What bad effect could be produced by my brother inheriting the fortune of a friend of the family?”

But the circumspect old man would give no further explanation.

“It is usual in such cases to let two brothers share alike. I tell you that it will not look well.”

And the doctor, a little put out, departed, and returning home, went to bed.

For some time he heard Jean walking softly in the next room, then, after drinking two glasses of water, he went to sleep.



III



CHAPTER III.

THE doctor woke next morning with a firm determination to make his fortune.

Many a time already he had formed this resolution, without following it up. At the outset of all his attempts at a new career, the hope of rapidly acquiring wealth sustained his efforts and confidence until he reached the first obstacle, the first check, which diverted him into a new path.

Sunk in his bed between the warm clothes, he lay and meditated. How many doctors had become wealthy men in a short time! A grain of tact was all that was necessary, for in the course of his studies he had been able to take the measure of the most celebrated professors, and he considered them all so many asses. He was certainly as good as they were, if not better. If he could only contrive in some way to get the fashionable and rich patients in Havre, he might easily make his hundred thousand francs a year. And he made a precise calculation of the certain profits. In the morning he

would go out and visit his patients. Taking the average at ten a day, which was low enough, and twenty francs apiece, this would give him at least seventy-two thousand francs a year—say seventy-five thousand, for ten patients a day was well below the mark. In the afternoon he would receive in his surgery an average of ten patients at ten francs each, or thirty-six thousand francs a year. In round numbers there was a hundred thousand francs. Then the old clients, and the friends whom he would visit at ten francs, and receive at five, might somewhat diminish this total, but that would be made up for by consultations with other doctors, and by all the little occasional windfalls of the profession.

Nothing could be more easy than to manage this, with a little clever puffing, and hints in the *Figaro* suggesting that the scientific body in Paris had its eye on him, and was interested in certain surprising cures effected by the young and modest proficient of Havre. He would be richer than his brother, richer and more celebrated, and better pleased with his lot, for he would owe his fortune to himself alone, and would be generous to his old parents, who would be justly proud of his reputation. He should not marry, for he did not want to burden his existence with a single woman who would bore him; but he should have good friends amongst his patients.

He felt himself so sure of success that he jumped out of bed as though to seize it on the spot, and dressed himself, in order to search the town for suitable apartments.

Then, as he wandered through the streets, he thought to himself how slight were the determining causes of our actions. Any time within three weeks he might, he ought to have come to this resolution which had suddenly taken shape within him, doubtless in consequence of his brother's legacy.

He paused before the doors where a placard announced "good" or "handsome apartments to let"—"apartments" without an adjective only exciting his scorn. Then he made inquiries with a haughty manner, measured the height of the ceilings, drew the plan of the suite in his notebook, with the communications, and the relative position of the entrances, announcing that he was a physician, and had many visitors. It was necessary

that the stairs should be wide and handsome; and moreover he would not reside on any but the first floor.

After taking down seven or eight addresses, and making two hundred entries, he went home to breakfast, being a quarter of an hour late.

In the vestibule he heard the noise of plates. They had begun without him. Why? They were not so punctual in the house as a rule. He was hurt and displeased, being somewhat susceptible. As soon as he entered, Roland said to him :

“Come along, Pierre, make haste. What the dickens! You know we have to go to the notary’s at two. This is not the day for mooning about.”

The doctor sat down without replying, having first kissed his mother and shaken hands with his father and brother; and he took the cutlet which had been kept for him, out of the dish in the middle of the table. It was cold and dry; doubtless the worst of the lot. He thought they might have left it in the oven till he came in, and not lose their heads so far as to completely forget the other, the elder son. The conversation, interrupted by his entrance, was resumed where it had been broken off.

“Now,” said Madame Roland to Jean, “this is what I should do at once. I should take handsome apartments, so as to cut a dash; I should show myself in society, go out riding, and pick out one or two interesting cases to take up, and make an impression in the courts. I should elect to be a sort of amateur advocate, much sought after. Thank God you are above want, and in fine, if you take a profession, it is only that you may not lose the benefit of your studies, and because a man ought never to live without doing anything.”

M. Roland, who was peeling a pear, exclaimed :

“By Jove, if I were you, I should buy a good boat—a coaster like our pilot boats. With that I should go as far as Senegal.”

Pierre too, was ready with his advice. It was not fortune, he said, which constituted the moral or intellectual worth of a man. For ordinary spirits it was only a source of degradation, whilst, on the other hand, it placed a powerful lever in the hands of the strong. But strong people were rare. If Jean were really a superior man, he could show

it, now that he was above want. But he would have to work a hundred times harder than he would under other circumstances. It was not a question of taking cases for or against the widow and orphan, and pocketing so many fees for every case, whether he lost or won it, but of becoming an eminent juriconsult, a light of the law.

And he added, by way of conclusion :

“If I had money, I should carve my way to fame.”

M. Roland shrugged his shoulders.

“Tra la la! The wisest course in life is to make it run smooth. We are not beasts of burden, but men. When we are born poor, we must work. Very well, we work, more's the pity. But when we have an income, by Jove, we must be fools to knock ourselves up with drudgery.”

Pierre replied with much grandeur :

“Our inclinations are not the same. I must confess that I have no respect for anything in the world except knowledge and intelligence. Everything else is below contempt.”

Madame Roland always made a point of softening the incessant shocks between father and son : so she turned the conversation, and began to talk of a murder committed in the previous week at Bolbec-Nointot. Thus their minds were soon busy over the circumstances which surrounded the outrage, drawn by that interesting horror, that attractive mystery of crimes, which, even when they are vulgar, shameful, and repelling, exercise a strange and widespread fascination on the curiosity of mankind.

But M. Roland drew out his watch from time to time. “Come,” he said, “we shall soon have to start.”

Pierre sneered.

“It is not one o'clock yet. Indeed, it was hardly worth while to make me eat a cold cutlet.”

“Are you coming to the notary's?” his mother asked.

“I? No. What could I do? My presence is certainly useless.”

Jean remained silent, as though he had nothing to do with the matter. When they were speaking of the Bolbec murder, he had ventured on a

few ideas as a lawyer, and made a few remarks on crime and criminals. Now he was silent again, but the brightness of his eye, the lively colour of his cheeks, the very brilliancy of his beard, seemed to bespeak his happiness.

After the departure of his family, Pierre, once more alone, renewed his morning's investigations amongst the apartments to let. After two or three hours of climbing up and down stairs he discovered at length, in the Boulevard François Premier, something attractive; a large *entresol*, with two doors in different streets, two drawing-rooms, a glazed corridor, where the patients awaiting their turn could walk amongst flowers, and a delightful round dining-room, looking over the sea.

When he was about to engage them, the rent, which was three thousand francs, startled him, for it was necessary to pay the first quarter in advance, and he had nothing—not even a sou—at his command.

The small fortune saved by his father amounted to scarcely eight thousand francs a year, and Pierre reproached himself with having frequently put his parents to trouble by his long hesitation in the choice of a career, his attempts which were constantly abandoned, and his repeated new beginnings in his studies. So he went away, promising a reply within two days; and the idea came into his head of asking his brother for this three months' rent, or even for six months'—that is to say, fifteen hundred francs, as soon as Jean was in possession of his legacy.

“It will be a loan,” he thought, “for a few months only. I shall probably return it even before the end of the year. It is a small matter, after all, and he will be glad to do this for me.”

As it was not yet four, and he had nothing, absolutely nothing to do, he went and sat down in the public gardens; and he remained sitting for a long time, thinking of nothing, with his eyes on the ground, oppressed by a weariness which was becoming painful.

And yet, during the days which had passed since his return to his father's house, he had lived thus, without suffering so much from the emptiness of his existence, and from his inactivity. How then had he passed his time between waking and sleeping?

He had lounged on the jetty when the tide came in, lounged in the streets, lounged in the *cafés*, lounged at Marowsko's, lounged everywhere. And now suddenly this life, which he had hitherto endured, became odious and intolerable to him. If he had had any money he would have hired a carriage, and taken a long drive in the country, along the roadside fences, overshadowed by beeches and ashes; but he had to count the price of a glass of ale, or of a postage stamp, and these whims were forbidden to him. He thought suddenly how hard it was, when one has passed one's thirtieth year, to ask one's mother now and then, with a blush, for a *louis*; and he muttered, as he raked the gravel with the end of his cane :

“I wish to Heaven I had some money!”

And the thought of his brother's inheritance came into his mind again, like the sting of a wasp; but he banished it impatiently, unwilling to give way to this jealousy.

Around him the children were playing on the dusty walks. They were fair, long-haired creatures, and they were very seriously, with grave attention, making little heaps of sand, in order to stamp them out afterwards with a single kick.

It was for Pierre one of those sad days on which we look into all the recesses of our souls, and shake out all their folds.

“Our enterprises are like the labours of these mites,” he thought. Then he asked himself if the wisest thing in life were not after all to beget two or three of these useless little creatures, and to see them grow up with pleasure and curiosity. And the desire of marriage came over him. When one is no longer alone, one is not such a lost man. At least one hears somebody stirring close to one, in the hours of trouble and anxiety, and it is something to speak familiarly to a woman when one is suffering.

He began to think about womankind.

He had very little knowledge of them, having only had fortnight's fancies in the Latin quarter, broken off when he had got through his month's money, and renewed or replaced the month after. Still there

must be very good, sweet, and comforting creatures in existence. Had not his mother been the satisfaction and charm of the paternal hearth? If he could only know a woman, a genuine woman!

He suddenly got up with the determination to pay a call on Madame Rosémilly. Then he sat down again promptly. She did not please him. Why? She had too much ordinary and inferior sense; and then, did not she seem to prefer Jean to him? Without plainly making the admission to himself, this preference had much to do with his poor opinion of the widow's intelligence; for, if he loved his brother, he could not help thinking him a little commonplace, and holding himself superior.

He was not going to stay there, however, till nightfall; and, as on the previous evening, he asked himself anxiously: "What am I to do?"

He felt in his soul a yearning for tenderness, to be kissed, and consoled. Consoled for what? He could not have answered the question, but he was in one of those moods of weakness and lassitude in which the presence of a woman, a woman's caress, the touch of a hand, the rustle of a dress, a soft look from a black eye or a blue eye, seem indispensable to our hearts, without a minute's delay.

And the recollection of a little barmaid whom he had once seen home, and whom he had visited once or twice afterwards, recurred to him.

He got up again, therefore, meaning to go and drink a glass with this girl. What should he say to her? What would she say to him? Nothing, of course. But what of that? He would hold her hand for a few seconds. She seemed to like him. Why then did he not go and see her more frequently?

He found her dozing in her chair, in the almost empty bar. Three toppers were smoking their pipes, with their elbows on the oak tables; the cashier was reading a novel, and the host, in his shirt-sleeves, was fast asleep on the couch.

When she saw him, the girl got up eagerly, and came to him.

"Good day. How are you by this time?"

"Not so bad. And you?"

"I am right enough. How scarcee you make yourself!"

"Yes. I have not much time on my hands. I am a doctor, you know."

"Why, you never told me that. If I had known, I was out of sorts last week, and I should have asked your advice. What are you going to have?"

"A glass of ale. And you?"

"I will have the same, as you are going to pay for it."

And she went on talking familiarly, as if the offer of refreshment had implied an invitation to do so. Then, seated in front of each other, they conversed. Now and then she took his hand with the easy familiarity of girls whose caress is for sale, and, looking at him with speaking eyes, said :

"Why don't you come oftener. I like you, my dear."

But he was already disgusted with her. He saw that she was stupid, common, and vulgar. Women, he said to himself, ought to appear to us in a dream, or in a golden mist of luxury which throws a poetic veil over their vulgarity.

"You passed the other morning," she said, "with a handsome, fair man, with a long beard. Is that your brother?"

"Yes, it is my brother."

"He is a very nice-looking fellow."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; and he looks like a free and easy man."

What strange impulse suddenly impelled him to tell this barmaid of Jean's legacy? Why did this idea, which he drove away when he was alone, which he repelled for fear of the disturbance it created in his mind, spring to his lips at this moment, and why did he let it flow out, as if he had need to empty his soul of its bitterness again, in the presence of another?

Crossing his legs, he said :

"He is lucky, is my brother. He has just come into twenty thousand francs a year."

She opened wide her blue and covetous eyes.



"Oh! And who has left him that? His grandmother, or his aunt?"

"No, an old friend of my parents?"

"Only a friend? Impossible! And has he left nothing to you?"

"No, I knew little of him."

She reflected for a few seconds; then, with a queer smile on her lips, said :

"Well, he is lucky, that brother of yours, to have friends of that sort. It is certainly not to be wondered at that he resembles you so little!"

He felt as if he could box her ears, without exactly knowing why, and he asked her sternly :

"What do you mean by that?"

She assumed a stupid and ingenuous look.

"Mean? Nothing. I mean that he is luckier than you."

He threw twenty sous on the table, and went away.

Then he repeated the sentence : "It is not to be wondered at that he resembles you so little!"

What was she thinking? What had she implied in these words? There was certainly something mischievous, malicious, infamous in them. Yes, this girl must have thought that Jean was the son of Maréchal.

The trouble he felt at this suspicion cast on his mother was so extreme that he stood still, and looked about for a seat.

Another *café* happened to be in front of him, and he entered, took a chair, and, when the waiter came up, said :

"A glass of ale."

He felt his heart beat; his flesh quivered under his skin. And suddenly he recalled what Marowski had said the night before : "That will not look well." Had he thought the same thing, had the same suspicion as this girl?

With his head bent over his glass, he watched the white froth sparkle and sink, and said to himself : "Is it possible that they should think so?"

The reasons which might cause this hateful suspicion to arise in their minds appeared to him now, one after another, plain, evident, exasperat-

ing. If an old bachelor without heirs were to leave his fortune to the two children of a friend, nothing could be more simple and natural; but when he gives it all to one of the children, people are sure to wonder, to whisper, and to smile. Why did he not foresee that? Why had not his father felt it? Why did his mother not guess it? No; they had been too delighted over this unexpected money to be visited by such an idea. And then, how could these simple folk have imagined such a disgrace?

But the public, the neighbours, the shopkeepers, small and great, all who knew them—would they not be repeating this abominable thing, amusing themselves over it, chuckling, laughing at his father, and despising his mother?

And the remark of the barmaid, that Jean was fair whilst he was dark, that they were not alike in face, or bearing, or figure, or mind, would henceforth strike every eye and every intelligence. When men spoke of a young Roland, some one would say: “Which—the real or the false?”

He jumped up, resolved to warn his brother, to put him on his guard against this terrible danger which threatened their mother’s good name. But what could Jean do? The simplest thing, surely, would be to refuse the legacy, which would then go to the poor, and tell one’s friends and acquaintances who had heard of the bequest merely that the will contained clauses and conditions which Jean could not accept, which would have made him not an heir, but a trustee.

As he returned to his father’s house he thought that he must see his brother alone, so as not to speak before his parents on such a subject.

When he reached the door he heard the sound of voices and laughter in the drawing-room, and on entering he heard Madame Rosémilly and Captain Beausire, who had been brought home by his father and kept to dinner, in order to celebrate the good news.

Vermouth and absinthe had been sent for, to give them an appetite, and they had been in a good humour from the first. Captain Beausire, a little man, round from much tossing on the sea, all whose ideas seemed

to be round also, like the pebbles on the shore, who laughed with his throat full of "r's," thought life an excellent business, in which everything was delightful.

He was drinking with Roland, whilst Jean was offering the ladies two brimming glasses.

Madame Rosémilly declined, when Captain Beausire, who had known her late husband, cried :

"Come, come, Madame—*bis repetita placent*, as we say in our *patois*, which means : 'Two vermouthis will never hurt you.' For my part, you know, since I gave up seafaring, I give myself every day before dinner two or three glasses of artificial rolling. I add a glass of pitching after my coffee, which leaves me in a heavy sea for the rest of the evening. I never get so far as a tempest—never, never, for I am afraid of damages."

Roland, whose nautical mania was flattered by the old sea-captain, laughed heartily, his face being already red, and his eye disturbed by the absinthe. He had a shopkeeper's paunch—he was all stomach, the rest of his body seeming to have passed into it—one of those flabby stomachs of sedentary men, who no longer possess thighs, nor chests, nor arms nor necks, the seat of their chair having pressed all their substance into the same receptacle.

Beausire, on the other hand, though short and stout, looked as full as an egg and as hard as a ball.

Madame Roland had not emptied her first glass, and, glowing with happiness, with brilliant eyes, was gazing at her son Jean.

With him, by this time, the crisis of joy was reached. The affair was sealed and signed; he had twenty thousand francs a year. From the way in which he laughed, from his more sonorous voice, from his manner of looking at people, from his cooler bearing and greater assurance, the aplomb which money gives a man was evident.

Dinner was announced; and as old Roland went to offer his arm to Madame Rosémilly, his wife cried :

"No, no, father; it must be Jean in everything to-day."

On the table, an unaccustomed luxury was conspicuous. In front of

Jean's plate—he was seated to-night in his father's chair—an enormous bouquet, full of silken favours, a regulation bouquet as befitted a grand ceremony, rose like a dome decked with flags, flanked with four dessert dishes, of which one held a pyramid of splendid peaches, the second a monumental cake smothered in whipped cream and covered with bell-flowers of moulded sugar—a baked cathedral, the third, slices of pine-apple, soaked in clear syrup, and the fourth (unheard-of luxury) black grapes from southern climes.

“*Bigre!*” said Pierre, as he sat down, “we are celebrating the accession of Jean the Rich.”

After the soup there was Madeira; and already every one was speaking at the same time. Beausire was telling of a dinner which he had had at San Domingo, at the table of a negro general. M. Roland was listening to him, trying meanwhile to slip in between the sentences a story of another feast given by one of his friends at Meudon, every guest at which had been ill for fifteen days after. Madame Rosémilly, Jean, and his mother, were planning an excursion and a breakfast at Saint-Jouin, at which they promised themselves beforehand unlimited joy; and Pierre was regretting that he had not dined alone, in a pot-house on the sea-shore, so as to avoid all this noise, this laughter and joy which depressed him.

He was thinking how he could manage now to tell his brother of his fears, and to make him renounce the fortune which he had already accepted, which he was enjoying, on which he was intoxicating himself beforehand. It would be hard for him, no doubt, but he must do it; he could not hesitate, for the reputation of their mother was endangered.

The appearance of an enormous barbel turned Roland upon fishing anecdotes. Beausire related some remarkable ones about the Gaboon, Sainte-Marie de Madagascar, and especially about the coasts of China and Japan, where the fish have a peculiar aspect, like the inhabitants. He told of the appearance of these fishes, their great golden eyes, their red and blue bellies, their quaint fins, like fans, their tails in the shape of

crescents, talking with such amusing gestures, that they all laughed until they cried, as they listened to him.

Pierre alone seemed incredulous, and muttered :

“One may well say that the Normans are the Gascons of the North.”

After the fish came a *vol-au-vent*, then a roast chicken, a salad, some French beans, and a pie of Pithiviers larks. Madame Rosémilly’s maid was helping to wait, and the gaiety increased with the number of glasses of wine. When the cork of the first champagne bottle flew, old M. Roland, greatly excited, imitated the sound of the explosion with his mouth, and said :

“I like that better than a pistol-shot.”

Pierre, who was more and more tormented, said with a sneer :

“Perhaps, all the same, it is more dangerous for you.”

Roland, who was about to drink, set down his full glass on the table. “Why, pray?” he asked.

He had long been complaining of his health, of heaviness, giddiness, constant and inexplicable discomforts. The doctor replied :

“Because a pistol-shot might go past you, whilst the glass of wine is received into your stomach.”

“What then?”

“Then it burns your stomach, disorganizes the nervous system, checks the circulation, and leads to apoplexy, with which all men of your temperament are menaced.”

The advancing intoxication of the old jeweller seemed to be dissipated like smoke before the wind; and he looked at his son with fixed and anxious eyes, trying to understand whether he was jesting or not.

But Beausire cried :

“Oh, these confounded doctors, they are all alike. You must not eat, you must not drink, you must not love, and you must not dance. All that kind of thing may do some little mischief to a man in poor health. Well, I have tried all that, sir, in all parts of the world, wherever I could, and as much as I could; and I am not a bit the worse for it.”

Pierre rejoined, with bitterness :

“In the first place, Captain, you are stronger than my father; and then all good livers talk like you until—— And they don’t come back next morning to say to the wise physician, ‘You were right, doctor.’ When I see my father do what is the worst and most dangerous thing for him, it is very natural that I should warn him. I should be a bad son if I did otherwise.”

Madame Roland, in despair, now struck in :

“But, Pierre, what is wrong with you? For once in a way this will not hurt him. Think what a great day this is for him, for us all. You will spoil his pleasure entirely, and vex us all. What you are doing is very unbecoming.”

He muttered as he shrugged his shoulders :

“Let him do what he likes. I have warned him.”

But old M. Roland did not drink. He gazed at his glass, his glass full of bright, transparent wine, whose light and intoxicating spirit was fleeting in little bubbles from the bottom, which leaped up rapidly one after another to break on the surface; and he looked at it with the distrust of a fox who finds a dead fowl, and suspects a snare.

“You think,” he said with much hesitation, “that this would do me a great deal of harm?”

Pierre felt remorseful, and reproached himself for making others feel his bad humour.

“No, go on, for once; drink it, but don’t abuse it, and don’t get into the habit.”

Then Roland raised his glass, without resolving even yet to carry it to his mouth. He looked at it sorrowfully, with desire and fear; then he smelt it, tasted it, drank it in sips, smacking his lips over them, with his heart full of anguish, of weakness, and gluttony, and finally of regret, as soon as he had sucked up the last drop.

Suddenly Pierre met the eye of Madame Rosémilly; it was fixed upon him, liquid and blue, penetrating and hard. And he felt, he realised, he divined the clear thought which inspired the look—the angry thought of this little woman with her simple and straightforward mind; for



the look said to him : "You are jealous, sir. That is shameful!"

He bent his head, and went on eating. He was not hungry; nothing was to his taste. He had a harassing desire to go away, to shake off this company, not to hear them talk, or jest, or laugh.

Meanwhile M. Roland, on whom the fumes of the wine were beginning to take effect, was already forgetting the counsels of his son, and was gazing with oblique and tender look at a bottle of champagne, still almost full, which stood by his plate. He dared not touch it, for fear of fresh admonitions, and he was thinking by what trick, by what clever device he could get hold of it without rousing Pierre's observation. He conceived a very simple plan. He took the bottle coolly, and, holding it by the bottom, stretched his arm across the table so as to fill first the glass of the doctor, which was empty; then he did the same to the other glasses, and when he came to his own he began to speak very loud, and, if he poured anything into it, you would have certainly sworn that it was by inadvertence. But nobody saw it.

Pierre thoughtlessly drank deep. Nervous and distressed, he repeatedly took up the long taper glass, in which the bubbles rose steadily in the living and transparent liquor, and raised it with an unconscious air to his lips. Then he let it flow gently through his mouth, that he might feel the little sugared stings of the gas as it evaporated on his tongue.

Gradually a pleasant warmth was diffused through his body. Rising from the stomach, as from a hearth, it reached the chest, passed into the limbs, and permeated the whole flesh, like a warm and healing wave, carrying pleasure with it. He felt himself better, less impatient, less dissatisfied; and even his resolution to speak to his brother to-night faded away; not that the thought of abandoning his intention had entered his mind, but he could not so quickly disturb the happiness which he was experiencing.

Beausire rose to propose a toast. With a sweeping bow he began :

"Most gracious ladies, gentlemen all! We are gathered together to celebrate a happy event which has just befallen one of our friends. They used to say that fortune was blind, but I believe she was simply

short-sighted or sportive, and that she has just possessed herself of a good marine binocular, which has enabled her to detect in the port of Havre the son of our good comrade Roland, captain of the *Perle*."

Applause leaped from every mouth, backed by clapping of hands; and the older Roland got up to reply.

After a fit of coughing—for he felt his throat swelling and his tongue a trifle heavy—he stuttered :

"Thanks, Captain! Thanks for myself and my son. I shall never forget your action on this occasion. Here's luck to you."

His eyes and nose were full of tears, and he sat down again, unable to say more.

Jean, with a laugh, set himself to speak :

"I must thank," he said, "my very devoted friends here, my excellent friends,"—he was looking at Madame Rosémilly—"who give me to-day this touching proof of their affection. But I cannot show my gratitude in words. I will prove it to-morrow, at every moment of my life, and always, for our friendship is not of the transitory sort."

His mother, greatly affected, murmured :

"Well said, my boy."

But Beausire cried :

"Come, Madame Rosémilly, speak for the fair sex."

She raised her glass, and with a pretty voice, having just a shade of sadness in it, said :

"I drink to the blessed memory of M. Maréchal."

There was a little approval of becoming composure, such as follows a prayer; and Beausire, who was prolific of compliments, observed :

"Ah, only women think of these refinements!"

Then turning to Roland the elder, he said :

"Now, what sort of a fellow really was this Maréchal? You must have been very intimate with him?"

The old man, softened with drink, began to cry, and said with a broken voice :

"He was a brother—don't you know—such as you only meet

once in a lifetime. We were never apart. He dined with us every evening—— and made it up by taking us to the theatre. That's all—— all—— all I can tell you. He was a friend. A regular—— regular—— wasn't he, Louise?"

And his wife answered quietly :

"Yes, he was a faithful friend."

Pierre was looking at his father and mother; but, as the conversation changed, he began to drink again.

He remembered little of the close of the evening. They had had coffee, sipped liqueurs, and laughed and joked a great deal. Then he went to bed, about midnight, with a confused mind and a heavy head. And he slept like an animal till nine o'clock in the morning.



IV



CHAPTER IV.

THAT slumber, steeped in champagne and chartreuse, must have softened and calmed him, for he awoke with the most benevolent disposition. As he was dressing he balanced, weighed, and rehearsed his emotions of the night before, trying to get clearly and fully at their real and secret causes—the causes which were personal, as well as those which were outside himself.

No doubt it was possible that the girl in the drinking-bar had imagined an evil thought, the natural thought of a bad woman, when she heard that only one of two brothers inherited a fortune from a stranger; but are not such creatures always having suspicions of this kind about virtuous women, without a shadow of reason? Are they not always heard, whenever they speak, insulting, calumniating, defaming the women whom they recognize as irreproachable? Whenever a woman above blame is mentioned before them, they get angry, as though they were being insulted, and

cry : “ Oh, yes, I know all about your married women, and their propriety. They have more dear friends than we, but they hold their tongues about it, being hypocrites. That is their propriety ! ”

At any other time he would not have understood, nor so much as conceived to be possible, such insinuations as these against his poor mother, good and simple and worthy as she was. But now his soul was disturbed by the leaven of jealousy which was fermenting in him. His overexcited spirit, on the watch, as it were, in spite of himself, for anything which might injure his brother, might have attributed to this beer-seller an odious meaning which she never had.

His imagination alone—that imagination which he did not hold in check, which was constantly eluding his will—had roamed at large, bold, venturesome, and truculent, amidst the infinite world of ideas, and brought back now and then shameful and unavowable conceptions, which it hid in its lair, in the depths of his soul, in unfathomable recesses, like stolen things ; it might be that this imagination alone had created or invented this terrible suspicion. His heart, surely his own heart kept secrets from him ; and had not this injured heart discovered in this hateful suspicion a means of depriving his brother of the inheritance of which he was jealous ? He suspected himself, now, interrogating all the mysteries of his thoughts, as devotees question their conscience.

Of a truth Madame Rosémilly, though her intelligence was limited, had a woman’s tact, scent, and subtle appreciation. Now this idea had not occurred to her, since she had drunk with perfect simplicity to the sacred memory of Maréchal. She would not have done that, if the slightest suspicion had occurred to her. Now he could no longer doubt that his involuntary disappointment over the fortune left to his brother, and also, surely, his devout love for his mother, had magnified his scruples, pious scruples and worthy of respect, even though exaggerated.

When he came to this conclusion, he was pleased, as we are when we have performed a good action, and he resolved to behave nicely to everybody, and began with his father, whose crotchets, foolish statements, and too conspicuous poverty of mind, were always vexing him.

He came to breakfast in good time, and amused the whole family by his spirit and good humour.

His mother, delighted, said to him :

“ Pierrot, you don't know how amusing and witty you can be, when you try. ”

And he chatted, made jokes, caused them all to laugh by his clever sketches of their friends. Beausire served him as a butt, and even Madame Rosémilly in some degree, though in a discreet manner, and without malice. And he thought, as he looked at his brother : “ Why don't you defend her, my simpleton ? No matter how rich you are, I shall eclipse you when I want to. ”

As they were taking their coffee, he said to his father :

“ Are you going to use the *Perle* to-day ? ”

“ No, my boy. ”

“ May I have her, with Jean-Bart ? ”

“ Of course you may, as much as you like. ”

He bought a good cigar at the first tobacconist's, and went lightly down to the quay.

He noticed that the sky was clear, bright, of a pale blue tint, refreshed and swept by the sea-breeze.

The sailor Papagris, who was called Jean-Bart, was asleep in the boat which it was his business to have ready at any hour up to midday, when no one went fishing in the morning.

“ We are going to have it to ourselves, skipper, ” said Pierre.

He descended the iron ladder of the quay, and jumped in.

“ How's the wind ? ” he said.

“ Steady from the east, M'sieu Pierre. We'll have a fine breeze off the land. ”

“ All right, governor ; off we go ! ”

They spread the foresail, and raised anchor, and the boat, set at liberty, glided slowly towards the pier on the calm harbour water. The weak breath of air blowing from the town took the top of the sail, so gently that it was not felt by them, and the *Perle* seemed as though animated

by a life of its own,—by a boat's life—and driven onward by a mysterious inner force. Pierre held the rudder, and, with his cigar between his teeth, his legs extended on the bench, his eyes half closed against the blinding rays of the sun, he saw the great tarred beams of the breakwater carried past him.

When they stood out for the open sea, after reaching the north extremity of the projecting jetty, the fresher breeze swept over the doctor's face and hands like a cold caress, entered his chest, which opened to drink it in with a long sigh, and, filling the brown expanding sail, made the *Perle* dip and assume fresh life.

Suddenly Jean-Bart ran out the jib sail, whose triangle, filled with wind, looked like a wing, then reaching the stern in a couple of strides, loosened the boom, which was lashed to the mast.

Then, on the side of the boat which was suddenly dipped in the sea, and racing now at full speed, there came a pleasant and lively sound of bubbling, rushing water.

The prow clove the sea like a ploughshare, and the mounting wave, elastic and white with foam, curled and fell again, as the upturned clods of earth fall flat and heavy.

At every wave they met—and they were short and close—the impact shook the *Perle* from jib-boom to helm, which quivered in Pierre's hand; and when the wind blew stronger, for a few seconds the waves struck amidships as though they would swamp the boat.

A steam coaling-vessel from Liverpool was at anchor, awaiting the tide; they went about in her rear, then approached one after another the ships lying in the roads, and finally stood out from land to see the coast line.

For three hours Pierre, calm and content, drifted on the tremulous sea, steering as though it were a winged animal, swift and obedient, this creature of wood and canvas, which came and went at his whim, under the stress of his fingers.

He dreamed, as one dreams on horseback, or on the bridge of a boat, thinking of his future, which was to be enviable, and of the delight

of living an intelligent life. To-morrow he should ask his brother to lend him fifteen hundred francs for three months, wherewith to settle himself at once in the delightful suite in the Boulevard François Premier.

Suddenly the sailor said :

“ There’s a storm coming. M’sieu Pierre. We must put back. ”

He raised his eyes, and saw towards the north a grey shadow, low and light, blotting out the sky and spreading over the sea, hurrying up to them, as though it were a cloud fallen from heaven.

He put about, and with the wind behind them steered for the jetty, followed close by the rapidly advancing storm. When it touched the *Perte*, enfolding it in its imperceptible mist, a cold shudder ran through Pierre’s limbs, and a whiff of smoke and damp, the strange smell of the sea fog, made him close his mouth, that he might not taste this wet and icy cloud.

When the boat was moored again, the town was already completely buried under this thin vapour, which, without falling, damped one like rain, and sank down upon houses and streets like a flowing stream.

Pierre, whose feet and hands were nipped, walked home quickly, and threw himself on his bed, so as to get a doze before dinner. When he made his appearance in the dining-room, his mother was saying to Jean :

“ The gallery will be charming. We will have flowers there. You will see ! I shall look after them, and see to their renewal. When you give parties, it will look simply fairy-like. ”

“ What are you talking of ? ” the doctor asked.

“ Of a delightful suite of rooms which I have just taken for your brother. It was quite a find—an *entresol* between two streets. It has two drawing-rooms, a glass-covered corridor, and a little round dining-room—simply delightful for a bachelor. ”

Pierre turned white. A fit of rage seized his heart.

“ Where is it ? ” he asked.

“ On the Boulevard François Premier. ”

He had no further doubt, and sank into a seat, so annoyed that he was

on the point of crying : "This is too much! There is nothing, save for him!"

His beaming mother went on talking :

" And just imagine that I have secured that for two thousand eight hundred francs. They wanted three thousand, but I got them to take off two hundred by making an agreement for three, six, or nine years. Your brother will be delightfully situated. An elegant house is enough to make an *avocat's* fortune. It attracts a client, charms him, retains him, inspires him with respect, and gives him to understand that a man lodged in that fashion receives a good price for his speeches."

She was silent for a few seconds, and continued :

" We must find something similar for you, much more modest, because you have nothing, but fairly nice all the same. I assure you that it will help you on considerably."

Pierre replied, scornfully :

" Oh, it is by work and knowledge that I shall get on."

His mother insisted on her point :

" Yes, but I assure you that pretty apartments will help you —"

Towards the middle of the meal he suddenly asked a question.

" How did you come to know this Maréchal?"

His father raised his head, and went back in his memory :

" Wait a bit; I am not very clear in my recollections. It is so long ago. Oh, yes, I remember. Your mother made his acquaintance in the shop—did you not, Louise? He had come to order something, and he came back again pretty often; we knew him as a customer, before knowing him as a friend."

Pierre, who was eating haricot beans, and transfixing them one after another on the point of his fork, went on :

" At what date was that acquaintance made?"

Roland ruminated again, but, remembering no more, he appealed to his wife's recollections.

" Let us see, Louise. You cannot have forgotten, with your good memory? Let us see. It was in—in—in fifty-five or fifty-six?— Think; you ought to know it better than I."



She thought for some time, accordingly ; and then, with a steady and tranquil voice, replied :

“ It was in fifty-eight, my dear. Pierre was then three years old. I am sure I am right, for it was the year when the child had scarlatina, and Maréchal, whom we knew very slightly at the time, was a great help to us.”

Roland exclaimed :

“ True, true ! Nay, he was admirable. As your mother was tired out, and I was busy in my shop, he used to go to the dispenser’s for your medicine. He was indeed a good-hearted fellow. And when you were cured, you cannot imagine how pleased he was, and how he kissed you. From that moment we became great friends.”

And this thought, sudden, violent, entered Pierre’s heart like a bullet which pierces and tears the flesh : “ Since he knew me first, and was so fond of me, since he liked me, and kissed me so much, since I was the cause of his great attachment to my parents, why did he leave all his fortune to my brother, and nothing to me ? ”

He asked no more questions, and continued silent, rather absorbed than in thought, retaining a new source of restlessness, vague as yet—the hidden germ of a new trouble.

He went out early, and began to roam the streets again. They were buried in the fog, which made the night oppressive, dark, and unwholesome. It was like a pestilential smoke, beaten down upon the ground. It was visible as it passed over the gas-jets, which at times it almost extinguished. The pavements grew slippery, as after frosty nights, and all kinds of evil odours seemed to come from within the houses—stinks of the cellars, of the cesspools, of the drains, of squalid kitchens—to mingle with the frightful smell of this creeping fog.

Pierre, with round back, and hands in his pockets, unwilling to remain outside in the cold, betook himself to Marowsko’s.

Under the gas-jet which kept watch for him, the old dispenser was sleeping as usual. When he recognized Pierre, whom he loved with the love of a faithful dog, he shook off his drowsiness, went to fetch a couple of glasses, and brought the groseillette.

“ Well,” said the doctor, “ how are you getting on with your liqueur ? ”

The Pole informed him that four of the principal *cafés* in the town had agreed to put it in circulation, and that the *Phare de la Côte*, and the *Sémaphore havrais* would puff it, in exchange for a few drugs which he was to place at the service of the staff.

After a long silence, Marowsko asked if Jean had come into his inheritance; then he put two or three other vague questions on the same subject. His jealous devotion to Pierre revolted against this preference. And Pierre fancied that he could hear him thinking aloud; guessed and understood, read in his averted eyes, in the hesitating tone of his voice, the phrases which came to his lips and which he did not speak out—which he would not speak out, being so prudent, timid, and crafty.

Now he could doubt no longer; the old man was thinking: “ You ought not to have let him accept this legacy, which will get your mother ill spoken of.” Perhaps he even thought that Jean was Maréchal’s son. Certainly he thought it! How should he not think it, so likely, so probable, so manifest it seemed to be! But as for him, Pierre, the son, had he not been striving with all his force, with all the subtlety of his heart, to deceive his reason, had he not been striving against this terrible suspicion?

And again, suddenly, the need for being alone in order to think, to discuss it with himself, to face this possible, yet monstrous thing boldly, without scruple, without weakness, came upon him in such overmastering force, that he got up without even drinking his glass of groseille, grasped the hand of the astonished dispenser, and plunged again into the fog of the streets.

He kept saying to himself: “ Why did this Maréchal leave all his fortune to Jean ? ”

It was not jealousy now, which made him ask this; it was no longer the rather mean, yet natural envy which he had been able to keep concealed within him, and which he had combated for three days past, but the dread of a terrible thing, the dread of believing for himself that his brother was the son of this man!

No, he did not believe it. He could not even put such a criminal

question to himself. But it was necessary that this suspicion, so slight, so improbable, should be rejected by him utterly and for ever. He must have light, certainty, complete security in his mind; for his mother was the only creature in the world whom he loved.

And as he wandered alone through the night, he would make a searching inquiry in his memory, in his understanding, from which the conspicuous truth should stand out. After that was done, he would think of it no more—never more. He would go to sleep.

“Come now,” he mused, “let us first examine the facts. Then I will recall everything I knew of him, of his behaviour towards my brother and myself. I will search out all the causes which could supply a motive for this preference— He saw Jean born? Yes, but he knew me before that—If he had loved my mother with a silent and reserved love, I should have been preferred, because it was through me, through my scarlet fever, that he became the intimate friend of my parents. Logically, therefore he ought to have made choice of me, to have possessed for me a more lively tenderness, unless he felt for my brother, as he saw him grow up, some instinctive attraction and predilection.”

Then he searched his memory, with a desperate application of his whole mind, his whole intellectual power, to build up again, to perceive once more, to renew acquaintance with, and enter into the man—this man who had been familiar to him, though indifferent to his heart, throughout his life in Paris.

But he felt that walking, the slight movement of his steps, somewhat disturbed his ideas, interfered with their steadiness, weakened their effect, and dimmed his memory.

In order to cast back upon the past, and its uncomprehended events, the keen regard from which nothing ought to escape, he must be motionless in some vast and empty space. And he decided to go and sit upon the pier, as he had done two nights ago.

As he drew near the harbour he heard from the open sea a sinister cry, like the bellowing of a bull, but longer and more powerful. It was the sound of a “siren”—the cry of ships lost in the fog.

A shudder stirred his flesh and contracted his heart, so strongly had it resounded in his soul and in his nerves, this cry of distress which he thought he had uttered himself. Another sound of the same kind pealed out, at a somewhat greater distance; then, close to him, the harbour signal, responding to these, sent forth a harrowing scream.

Pierre reached the pier with long strides, thinking of nothing more, content to be within these mournful and howling shades.

When he had taken his seat on the extremity of the breakwater, he closed his eyes, that he might not see the electric lights, veiled in the mist, which make it possible to enter the harbour by night, or the red flame of the lighthouse on the southern pier, which, however, could scarcely be distinguished.

Then, half turned round, he rested his elbows on the granite, and buried his face in his hands.

In thought, though he did not pronounce the word with his lips, he kept repeating, as if to summon him, to evoke and call forth his shade :

“ Maréchal ! Maréchal ! ”

And in the darkness, under his closed eyelids, he suddenly saw him, just as he had known him. He was a man of sixty, with a pointed white beard, and thick eyebrows equally white. He was neither tall nor short; he had a pleasant aspect, grey and tender eyes, modest demeanour, the bearing of a good, simple, and affectionate man. He used to call Pierre and Jean “ my dear children,” had never seemed to prefer one to the other, and used to have them both to dinner.

And Pierre, with the tenacity of a dog which follows a dispersed scent, set himself to examine the words, gestures, intonations, looks of this man who had disappeared from the world. He brought him back, little by little, in his apartment in the Rue Tronchet, when he used to have his brother and himself at his table.

Two maids used to wait on them, both old, who had long since grown accustomed to speak of “ Monsieur Pierre ” and “ Monsieur Jean.”

Maréchal would stretch out his two hands to the youngsters, his right to one and his left to the other, just as they happened to enter.



"Good day, my children," he would say. "have you heard from your parents? They never write to me."

They used to talk of ordinary matters, pleasantly and familiarly. There was nothing original in the mind of this man, but much amenity, charm, and grace. He was certainly a good friend to them, one of those good friends of whom we scarcely think, because we are so sure of them.

Now recollections began to flood the mind of Pierre. Seeing him anxious now and then, and guessing his poverty as a student, Maréchal had offered and lent him money, a few hundred francs perhaps, forgotten on both sides, and never paid back. So this man always loved him, was always interested in him, seeing that he troubled himself about his wants. Then — then why leave all his fortune to Jean? No, he had never been perceptibly more affectionate towards the younger than towards the elder, more taken up with one than with the other, less tender to all appearances with one than with the other. Then—— then—— there must have been a powerful and secret reason for giving all to Jean—all—and nothing to Pierre. The more he thought of it, the more he revived the later years of the past, the more the doctor considered this difference created between the two unlikely and incredible.

And a sharp pain, an unutterable anguish invaded his breast, causing his heart to beat like a fluttering scarf. Its springs seemed to be broken, and the blood flowed in strong waves, shaking it with a tumultuous rush.

Then, half aloud, as one speaks in a nightmare, he murmured: "I must know. Oh, God! I must know."

Now he groped further, in the more distant days when his parents were living in Paris. But the faces escaped him, and this dimmed his recollections. He was especially eager to get back to Maréchal, with his hair—was it light, brown, or black? He could not do it, the last face of the man, his old face, having blotted out the others. Yet he remembered that he was more slender, that he had a soft hand, and that he often carried flowers—very often, for his father was always saying: "More bouquets! This is madness, my dear fellow. You will ruin yourself in roses."

Maréchal used to answer : “ Oh, never mind ; it is a pleasure to me.”

And suddenly his mother’s voice, as she smiled and said “ Thank you, my friend ! ” crossed his mind, so clearly that he thought he heard it. She must have said it very often, for these four words to be thus engraven in the memory of her son !

So, Maréchal used to bring flowers—he, the rich man, the gentleman, the customer—to the little shopkeeper, to the wife of the modest jeweller. Had he loved her ? How could he have become the friend of these tradespeople, if he had not loved the wife ? He was a man of culture, of considerable refinement. How often had he spoken about poets and poetry to Pierre ! He did not appreciate authors like a critic, but like an average man capable of being thrilled. The doctor had often smiled at these soft emotions, which he considered rather silly. Now he understood that this sentimental man could never have been the friend of his father, his positive, worldly, dull father, for whom the word “ poetry ” was equivalent to foolishness.

This Maréchal, then, young, free, rich, ready for any degree of tenderness, had come one day into the shop, by mere chance, having possibly observed a pretty shopkeeper. He had bought, come again, chatted more familiarly every day, paying by frequent purchases for the right of sitting in this house, smiling on the young wife, and shaking the hand of her husband.

And then afterwards—afterwards—— Oh, God !—— afterwards !

He had taken to and caressed the first child, the jeweller’s child, up to the birth of the other : then he had continued impenetrable until death ; and then, when his tomb was closed, his body dissolved, his name wiped out of the book of the living, his whole existence disappeared for ever, having nothing more to do, to fear, or to hide, he had given his whole fortune to the youngest child !—— Why ?——

The man was intelligent—— he must have understood and foreseen that he might—that he almost inevitably must have caused people to conclude that this child was his own. Then he would be bringing disgrace on a woman ? How could he have done that if Jean was not his son ?

And all at once a precise and terrible recollection crossed Pierre's mind. Maréchal was fair, as fair as Jean. He remembered now a little miniature portrait which he had once seen in Paris, on their drawing-room mantel-piece, which had disappeared. Where was it? Lost or concealed? Oh, if he could have it in his hands for no more than a second! His mother had kept it, perhaps, in that private drawer where one keeps the mementos of love.

His distress at this thought became so harrowing that he uttered a groan, one of those short laments torn from the breast by too acute pains. And suddenly, as if it had heard him, as if it had understood and responded to him, the pier signal howled quite close to him. Its clamour, as of a supernatural monster, more resonant than thunder, a savage and formidable roar created to overcome the voices of the wind and waves, spread through the darkness over the invisible sea, buried beneath the fogs.

Then through the mist, near or far off, similar sounds were raised again in the darkness. They were terrible, these cries uttered by the great blind steamers. Then all was still again.

Pierre had opened his eyes, and was looking about him, surprised to find himself there, awakened from his nightmare.

"I am mad," he thought, "I am suspecting my mother."

And a rush of love and tenderness, of repentance, of prayer, and desolation, overwhelmed his heart. His mother! Knowing her as he did, how could he have suspected her? Were not the soul and the life of this simple, virtuous, and loyal woman more transparent than water? To see and to know her, how was it possible not to think her beyond reproach? And it was he, her son, who had doubted her! Oh, if he could have taken her in his arms at this moment, how he would have kissed and fondled her, how he would have knelt to her, and begged her to pardon him!

She, deceive his father—she!—His father! Surely he was a good man, honourable and upright in business, though his mind had never crossed the horizon of his shop. How could this woman, once very

pretty, as he knew and could still see, endowed with a delicate, affectionate, tender soul, have accepted a man who differed from her so greatly, as a lover and a husband?

Why ask? She had married, as girls will marry, the well-to-do man whom their parents bring before them. They had established themselves forthwith in their shop in the Rue Montmartre, and the young wife, mistress at the desk, animated by the spirit of the new home, by the subtle and sacred sense of common interest which is a substitute for love, and even for affection, in most of the tradesmen's households of Paris, had set herself to work with her whole active and acute intelligence for the hoped-for prosperity of their house. And her life had passed in this way, uniform, tranquil, virtuous, without love!—

Without love?— Was it possible that a woman should not love? A young and pretty woman, living in Paris, reading books, applauding actresses who die of passion on the stage, could she pass from youth to old age, and her heart not be even once touched? He would not believe it of another woman—why believe it of his mother?

Certainly she might have loved, like any one else! For why should she be different from any one else, though she was his mother?

She had been young, with all the poetic weaknesses which affect the heart of the young! Shut up, imprisoned in the shop, with a vulgar husband always talking of trade, she had dreamed of moonlight, of travels, of kisses under the shade of night. And then a man one day had come in, as lovers come in books, and he had spoken as they speak.

She had loved him. Why not? But she was his mother. Well! Need he be so blind and stupid as to reject evidence because his mother was in question?

Had she yielded?— Yes, for this man had no other female friend. Yes, for he had remained faithful to the woman when she was at a distance and grown old. Yes, for he had left his whole fortune to his son, to their son!

And Pierre rose, trembling with such rage that he could have made up his mind to kill somebody? His outstretched arm, his open hand,

itched to strike, to wound, to crush, to strangle. Whom? Every one. His father, his brother; the dead man, his mother!

He rushed homeward. What did he mean to do?

As he passed a turret near the signal mast, the strident cry of the siren exploded in his face. His surprise was so great that he was near falling, and he staggered back to the granite parapet. He sat down there, destitute of strength, shattered by the uproar.

The steamer which was first to respond seemed quite close to him, and lay at the entrance of the harbour. It was high tide.

Pierre turned round, and saw its red eye dimmed with mist. Then, under the illumination diffused by the electric lights of the harbour, a great black shadow could be traced between the two jetties. Behind him the voice of the watchman, the hoarse voice of an old retired captain, cried :

“ Ship’s name ? ”

And amid the fog the voice of the pilot standing on the bridge, hoarse like the other, made answer.

“ *Santa Lucia !* ”

“ Country ? ”

“ Italy ! ”

“ Port ? ”

“ Naples. ”

And Pierre thought that he saw before his disordered gaze the fiery plume of Vesuvius, whilst at the foot of the volcano fire-flies were darting in the orange-thickets of Sorrento or Castellamare. How often had he dreamed of these familiar names, as though he had known the countries! Oh, if he could have departed, at once, no matter where, and never come back, never written, never let them know what had become of him! But no; he must go back, home to his father’s house, and sleep in his bed!

But he would not go back. He would wait for daylight. The sound of the “sirens” pleased him. He rose and began to walk, like an officer keeping his watch on the bridge.

Another ship approached behind the first, enormous and mysterious.

It was an Englishman, homeward bound from India.

He saw several others, emerging one by one from the impenetrable shadow. Then, as the damp of the fog became intolerable, Pierre set off on his way to the town. He was so cold that he went into a sailors' *café* to get a glass of spirits; and when the hot and spiced brandy had burned his palate and throat, he felt a hope reviving within him.

Perhaps he was mistaken? He knew that extravagant folly of his so well! He must have deceived himself. He had piled up the proofs as one draws up an indictment against an innocent man, whom it is always easy to convict when one is minded to think him guilty. He would think very differently when he had slept. So he went home and to bed; and, by force of will, he succeeded in falling asleep.



V



CHAPTER V.

BUT the doctor barely slept an hour or two, in a restless and troubled slumber. When he awoke, in the darkness of his warm and closed room, he felt, even before his thoughts were clear again, that painful oppression and disturbance of soul which the grief on which we sleep leaves within us. It is as though the unhappiness whose impact only shocked us overnight, had crept during sleep into our very flesh, which it hurt and wearied like a fever. Suddenly recollection came back to him, and he sat up in bed.

Then he began again, slowly, one by one, all the arguments which had tortured his heart on the pier, amidst the clamour of the sirens. The more he thought, the less he doubted. He felt himself drawn by his logic, as though by a dragging and strangling hand, to intolerable

certainly. He was thirsty and hot, and his heart thumped. He got up to open the window and breathe, and when he was on his feet a light sound reached him through the wall.

Jean was sleeping lightly, and snoring a little. *He* could sleep! He had foreboded nothing, guessed nothing. A man who had known their mother had left him all his fortune. He took the money, thinking it right and natural. He slept, rich and satisfied, without knowing that his brother was panting with pain and distress. And anger rose within him at this careless and contented snorer.

Last night he would have knocked at the door, entered, and sitting by the bed, would have said to him in the alfright of his sudden awakening: "Jean, you must not keep this legacy, which to-morrow might cause our mother to be suspected of dishonour."

But to-day he could no longer speak; he could not tell Jean that he did not believe him to be the son of their father. He must now keep and bury within him this shame which he had discovered, hide from all the blot which he had perceived, and which no man must detect; not even his brother—above all, not his brother.

He scarcely thought now of idle regard for what people might think. He would have been willing that everybody should accuse his mother, provided he knew her to be innocent—he, and he alone. How could he endure to live by her side, day by day, and to believe, as he looked at her, that his brother was the child of a stranger?

How calm and serene she was, notwithstanding! How self-possessed she seemed to be.

Was it possible that a woman such as she was, a woman of pure soul and good heart, could fall a victim to passion, with no after-appearance of remorse, no recollections of a troubled conscience?

Ah! remorse! remorse! It must once have troubled her, in the earlier days, and then have been blotted out, as everything is blotted out. Surely she had mourned her fault, and had gradually all but forgotten it. Have not all women, without exception, this prodigious power of forgetfulness, which scarcely even permits them to recall, after the lapse of a few years,

the man to whom they have wholly abandoned themselves? The kiss strikes like lightning, love passes like a storm, and then life grows calm again like the sky, and goes on as of old. Does one remember a cloud?

Pierre could stay in his chamber no longer. This house, his father's house, oppressed him. The roof seemed to weigh upon his head, and the walls to smother him. And as he was very thirsty, he lighted his candle in order to go and drink a glass of cool water from the filter in the kitchen. He went down the two flights, and then, as he was going up again with the carafe full, he sat down in his shirt on the stairs, where there was a current of air, and drank, without a glass, long draughts of water, like a runner who is out of breath. When he had ceased to move about, the silence of the house troubled him; then he heard the slightest noises, one by one. First it was the clock of the dining-room, whose ticking seemed to grow louder every moment. Then he heard a snoring again, the snoring of an old man, short, difficult, and hard; his father's, no doubt; and he was irritated by the idea, as though it had only just occurred to him, that these two men who were snoring in the same house, the father and the son, were nothing at all to each other! No tie, not the slightest, connected them, and they did not know it! They spoke to each other tenderly, they embraced, rejoiced, were affected together over the same things, as though the same blood had flowed in their veins. And two persons born at the two extremities of the world could not be greater strangers to each other than this father and this son. They thought they loved each other because a lie had grown up between them. It was a lie which created this paternal love and this filial love, a lie which it was impossible to expose, and which nobody would ever know except him, the true son.

And yet—— and yet—— suppose he were deceiving himself? How could he make sure? Ah, if some resemblance, however slight, existed between his father and Jean, one of those mysterious resemblances which pass down from grandfather to great-grandchildren, showing that the whole man descends directly from a single stock. So little would have been necessary for him, a physician, to recognize that—the form of the jaw,

the curve of the nose, the distance of the eyes, the character of the teeth or hair; less still, even a trick, a habit, a mannerism, a transmitted taste, any sign which would have been characteristic to a practised eye.

He searched his memory, and could remember nothing—no, nothing. But he had scarcely looked, perhaps, having no motive for observing these faint indications.

He got up to return to his room, and began to ascend the stairs, slowly, and thinking still. He passed his brother's door, and stopped short, stretching out his hand to open it. An urgent desire came upon him to see Jean at once, to take a long look at him, to surprise him in his sleep, whilst the quiet face and relaxed features were at rest, and every living gesture had disappeared. So might he grasp the slumbering secret of his physiognomy; and if any appreciable resemblance existed, it could not escape him.

But if Jean should wake, what would he say? How could he explain that visit?

He remained standing, his fingers closed on the lock, and casting about for a reason, a pretext. He suddenly remembered that he had lent his brother, a week ago, a phial of *landanum* to ease a toothache. He might have a toothache himself to-night, and come to get his medicine back. So he entered, but stealthily, like a thief.

Jean, with his mouth half open, was sleeping the deep sleep of an animal. His beard and light hair made a patch of gold on the white linen. He did not wake, but he ceased to snore.

Pierre, stooping over him, looked at him with a greedy eye. No, that young man had no resemblance to Roland; and for the second time there arose in his mind the recollection of the little vanished portrait of *Maréchal*. He must find it, and when he saw it he would doubt no longer.

His brother moved, doubtless troubled by his presence, or by the light of the candle shining through his eyelids! Then the doctor retired, on tiptoe, to the door, which he closed without a noise; and so he returned to his room, but not to bed.

The day was slow in coming. The hours struck, one after another,



from the dining-room clock, which had a deep and serious tone, as though this little machine had swallowed a cathedral bell. They mounted the vacant staircase, passed through walls and doors, died away among the rooms, in the dull ear of the sleepers.

Pierre had begun to walk to and fro, between his bed and the window. What was he to do? He was too upset to pass this day with his family. He wanted to be still alone, at least until to-morrow, so as to reflect, to grow calm, to strengthen himself for the daily life which he must resume.

Well! He would go to Trouville, and watch the bustle of the crowd on the beach. That would change the aspect of his thoughts, and give him time to prepare for the horrible thing which he had discovered.

When dawn appeared, he washed and dressed. The fog was dispersed, and it was very fine. As the Trouville steamer did not leave the port till nine o'clock, the doctor thought that he ought to say good morning to his mother before he left.

He waited until the hour when she usually rose, and then went down. His heart beat so loudly as he touched her door that he waited to draw breath. His hand, resting on the lock, was weak and shaking, almost incapable of the slight effort required to turn the handle. He knocked.

"Who is it?" asked his mother's voice.

"I, Pierre."

"What do you want?"

"To say good morning. I am going to spend the day at Trouville with some friends."

"I am still in bed."

"Well then, don't trouble. I will kiss you when I come back, to-night."

He hoped that he might go without seeing her, without pressing on her cheek the deceitful kiss which revolted his heart beforehand.

But she answered :

"Wait a minute, I will open to you. Wait until I am in bed again."

He heard her naked feet on the floor, and then the sliding of the bolt.

"Come in!" she cried.

He went in. She was sitting up in bed, whilst Roland, by her side, with a nightcap on his head, and his face to the wall, slept on soundly. Nothing woke him, so long as he was not taken by the arm and shaken. On fishing days it was the maid, rung up at the appointed hour by the sailor Papagris, who came up and dragged her master from this invincible repose.

Pierre, as he walked towards her, looked at his mother, and it seemed to him all at once as though he had never seen her.

She held out her cheek to him, and he kissed her twice; then he sat down on a low chair.

“Was it last night that you arranged that party?” she asked.

“Yes, last night.”

“You are coming back for dinner?”

“I am not sure, yet. At any rate, don’t wait for me.”

He was observing her with a stupified curiosity. This woman was his mother! The whole face, which he had seen from his infancy, from the moment when his eye could distinguish one thing from another, that smile, that voice which he knew so well, which was so familiar, seemed all on a sudden new and different from what they had hitherto been to him. He understood now that, loving her, he had never studied her. Yet there was no doubt as to her identity, and he knew each of the smallest details of her face, but he saw clearly each of these little details for the first time. His anxious attention, studying that dearly-loved head, revealed it to him in a different aspect, with a physiognomy which he had never discovered.

He rose to go; then, yielding suddenly to the unconquerable thirst for knowledge which had gnawed at his heart since the previous night:

“By the way, I thought I remembered that there was once, at Paris, a little portrait of Maréchal in our drawing-room.”

She hesitated for a second or two, or at least he fancied that she hesitated. Then she said:

“Yes, there was.”

“And what has become of that portrait?”

Again she might have been quicker over her reply.

“That portrait — let me see — I am not quite sure — Perhaps I have it in my desk.”

“I should be so glad if you could find it.”

“Yes, I will look for it. Why do you want it?”

“Oh, it is not for myself. I thought it would be natural to give it to Jean, and that it would please him.”

“Yes, you are right, it is a happy idea. I will go and look for it as soon as I am dressed.”

Then he went away.

It was a day of blue, without a breath of air. The people in the street seemed cheerful; the merchants were going about their business, the clerks to their desks, the girls to their shops. A few were singing, enlivened by the brightness. The passengers were already embarking on the Trouville steamer. Pierre sat in the stern, on a wooden bench.

“Was she troubled,” he asked himself, “by my question about the portrait, or only surprised? Did she lose it or hide it? Does she know where it is, or does she not? If she hid it, why?”

And his mind, always on the same track, from one deduction to another, came to the following conclusion :

The portrait, which was the portrait of a friend and a lover, had remained in the drawing-room until the day when the wife and mother had perceived, before anybody else, that it was like her son. Doubtless for a long time she had watched for this resemblance; then, having discovered it, having seen it appear, and understanding that any one might see it likewise, one day or the other, she had one evening removed the alarming little miniature, and had hidden it, not daring to destroy it.

And Pierre remembered clearly now that this miniature had long disappeared, long before their departure from Paris! It had disappeared, he thought, when Jean’s beard, beginning to grow, had suddenly rendered him like the fair young man who smiled from the picture-frame.

The motion of the vessel disturbed his thought, and scattered it. Then he stood up, and looked at the sea.

The little steamer emerged from the jetties, turned to the left, and

went puffing and quivering towards the distant coast, just visible in the morning haze. Here and there the red sail of a fishing-smack, motionless on the level sea, looked like a great rock standing out of the water.

In less than an hour they came to the port of Trouville, and as it was bathing time, Pierre betook himself to the beach.

From a distance the beach looked like a long garden full of brilliant flowers. On the great stretch of yellow sand, from the jetty to the Black Rocks, sunshades of every colour, hats of every shape, dresses of every hue, in groups before the machines, in lines along the surf, or scattered up and down, were like nothing so much as enormous flower beds in a vast meadow. And the confused noise, near and far, of voices resounding in the air, the shouts, the cries of bathing children, the shrill laughter of the women, created a constant and pleasant hum, mingled with the imperceptible breeze, so that one drew them in together.

Pierre walked about amidst those people, more divided from them, more isolated, more deeply plunged in his tormenting thoughts, than if he had been cast into the sea from the deck of a ship a hundred leagues from land. He brushed against them, heard, without listening, some of their talk; and without looking he saw the men speaking to the women, and the women smiling at the men.

But suddenly, as though he had awoke from sleep, he saw them distinctly; and hatred rose up in his mind against them, because they seemed happy and content.

Now he went amongst the groups, moving round them, occupied with new thoughts. All these many-coloured dresses which covered the sand like a flower garden, these pretty garments, these bright sunshades, the artificial grace of the tight-laced figures, all the ingenious tricks of fashion, from the tiny shoes to the extravagant hat, the seductive gestures, voices, and smiles—in brief, the coquettish airs displayed in every part of the beach, looked to him suddenly like an immense efflorescence of feminine perversity. All these dressed-up women were seeking to please, to lead astray, to tempt some one. They had made themselves beautiful for men, for all men except for the husband whom there was no longer any need to



conquer. They had made themselves beautiful for the lover of to-day and the lover of to-morrow, for some unknown man whom they had met, remarked, or perhaps expected. And these men, seated near them, eye to eye, mouth speaking close to mouth, challenged and coveted them, hunted them like fleeting game, although they seemed so near and so easy to catch. This vast beach, then, was but a market of love, where some women were sold and others gave themselves away, some traded on their favours, and others merely promised themselves. All these women thought but of one and the same thing, to present and create a desire for their persons, which had already been given, sold, or promised to other men. And he mused that throughout the whole world it was ever the same thing.

His mother had done like the rest—that was all! Like the rest? No! There were exceptions; many, to be sure! The creatures whom he saw around him, rich, light-minded, covetous of love, belonged in fact to the elegant and worldly class of intriguers, or even to the class which had its regular tariff, for on the beach, trampled by the legion of idlers, you did not meet the legion of virtuous women who were held safe at home.

The sea was coming in, gradually driving towards the town the first line of bathers. Groups were seen briskly rising and taking to flight, carrying their seats with them, before the advancing yellow surf fringed with a little lace of foam. The rumbling machines, yoked to a horse, came up likewise, and on the planks of the promenade which borders the beach from end to end, there was a continuous stream, dense and slow, of elegant people, forming two adverse currents, which elbowed and crowded each other. Pierre, nervous, irritated by the jostling, fled away, buried himself in the town, and stopped to break his fast at a modest wine-shop at the entrance to the meadows.

When he had taken his coffee he stretched himself on two chairs in front of the door, and as he had scarcely slept the night before, he fell into a slumber beneath the shadow of a lime.

After a few hours' rest, having roused himself, he saw that it was time to go back and catch the boat, and he set forth, handicapped by a sudden cramp, which had seized him in his sleep. Now he wanted to get home;

he wanted to see if his mother had found the portrait of Maréchal. And would she be the first to speak, or would he have to ask for it again? Certainly, if she expected to be questioned again, she had a secret reason for not showing the picture.

But when he had returned to his room, he hesitated to go down to dine. He was suffering too much. His revolted heart had not yet had time to regain its calm.

But he made up his mind, and appeared in the dining-room as they were sitting down to table. Cheerfulness lighted up every face.

"Well!" said Roland, "how are you getting on with your purchases? I don't want to see anything till the place is complete."

"Of course you don't," answered Madame Roland. "But we must take plenty of time to consider, so as not to get anything out of keeping. The furnishing question gives us a good deal of trouble."

She had spent the day in going with Jean to upholsterers and furniture shops. She desired to have rich materials, somewhat showy, to catch the eye. Her son, on the other hand, wanted something simple and out of the common. Accordingly they had both rehearsed their arguments over each article put before them. She made out that the client, the man who goes to law, needs to be impressed, that he ought to experience an effect of luxury when he enters the reception-room.

Jean, on the contrary, wishing to attract only an elegant and wealthy connection, would work on the minds of refined people by his modest and unquestionable taste. And the discussion, which had lasted all day, was resumed over the soup.

Roland had no opinion. He kept saying :

"I don't want to hear anything. I shall go and look when it is finished."

Madame Roland appealed to the judgment of her elder son :

"Come, Pierre, what do you think?"

His nerves were so highly strung that he could have answered with an oath. Nevertheless, he said in a dry and irritated tone :

"For my part, I am entirely of Jean's opinion. I only care for sim-

plicity, which is, in matters of taste, what uprightness is in the matter of character."

His mother replied :

"Remember that we are living in a town of merchants, where good taste is not picked up in the streets."

Pierre answered :

"What then? Is that a reason for imitating fools? If my countrymen are stupid or dishonest, need I follow their example? A woman will not go wrong simply because her neighbours have their lovers."

Jean burst out laughing.

"You give us comparative reasons which seem to be taken from the maxims of a moralist."

Pierre made no answer. His mother and brother began to talk again of stuff and couches. He looked at them as he had looked at his mother in the morning, before he set out for Trouville—like a stranger who is making his observations; and in fact he seemed as if he had suddenly entered an unknown family.

His father, in particular, startled both his sight and his thoughts. This fat and flabby man, self-satisfied and foolish, was his father—his! No, no, Jean was in no sense like him.

His family! For two days past an unknown and malevolent hand, the hand of a dead man, had torn and broken, one by one, all the bonds which held these four people together. It was destroyed—it was shattered. He had no longer a mother, for he could no longer cherish her, since he could not reverence her with that absolute, tender, and pious respect which the heart of a son demands; no longer a brother, since this brother was a stranger's child. He had but a father—this coarse man whom he did not love, however he tried.

And suddenly he asked :

"Well, mamma, have you found that portrait?"

She opened her eyes in wonder.

"What portrait?"

"The portrait of Maréchal."

"No—— I mean yes—— I have not found it, but I think I know where it is."

"What's that?" asked Roland.

"It's a little portrait of Maréchal," said Pierre, "which used to be in our drawing-room at Paris. I thought Jean would like to have it."

M. Roland cried out :

"Yes, yes! I remember perfectly; why, I saw it again at the end of last week. Your mother pulled it out of her desk when she was arranging her papers. It was Thursday or Friday, you remember, Louise? I was about to shave, when you took it from a drawer, and laid it on a chair by your side, with a heap of letters, half of which you burned. Ha, ha! It was odd that you should have touched this portrait barely two or three days before Jean came into his fortune. If I believed in presentiments, I should say that was one!"

Madame Roland replied, calmly :

"Yes, yes; I know where it is. I will go and find it presently."

So she had lied! She had lied this morning even, when she answered her son's question as to what had become of the miniature with the words : "I am not quite sure—— perhaps I have it in my desk."

She had seen, looked at it a few days before; then she had hidden it again in the private drawer with letters—with the letters of that man.

Pierre looked at his mother, who had told a lie! He looked at her with the sharp anger of a son who had been cheated, disappointed in his most sacred affections, and with the jealousy of a man who had long been blind, but at last discovers a shameful treason. If he had been her husband—he, who was her child—he should have seized her by the wrists, or the shoulders, or the hair, cast her to the ground, struck her, hurt her, crushed her! And he could say nothing, do nothing, show nothing, and reveal nothing. He was her son; he had nothing to avenge, for he had not been deceived.

And yet he had been deceived in his love, deceived in his pious respect. She ought to have been irreproachable to him, as all mothers should be to their sons. If the rage with which he was attacked rose almost to

hatred, it was because he felt that she had offended against himself more even than against his father.

The love of a man and woman is a voluntary compact, in which the one who fails is guilty only of perfidy; but when the wife has become a mother, her duty has increased, for nature has intrusted her with a race. If she fails then, she is a coward, worthless, infamous!

"I must confess," old Roland suddenly exclaimed, stretching out his legs under the table, as he did every evening when he sipped his glass of currant-wine, "I must confess that it is not such a bad thing to live an idle life when you have an independent income. I hope Jean will give good dinners now; and if I get occasional indigestion, I can't help it." Then, turning to his wife, he said: "Go and find that portrait, darling, as you have done your dinner. I should like to see it too."

She rose, took a candle, and went out.

Then, after an absence which seemed long to Pierre, though it was under three minutes, Madame Roland returned with a smile, holding by its ring an antique gold frame.

"There," she said, "I found it almost immediately."

The doctor had been the first to extend his hand. He took the portrait, and examined it at a little distance, at arm's length. Then, feeling that his mother was looking at him, he slowly raised his eyes to his brother, in order to make a comparison. He was nearly saying, carried away by his vehemence: "Why, that resembles Jean." If he dare not utter those terrible words, he revealed his thoughts by the manner in which he compared the living face with the painted one.

There were certainly features in common, the same beard and the same forehead, but nothing precise enough to justify one in saying: "This is the father, and this is the son." It was more a family resemblance, a link between two faces animated by the same blood. Now, what was more decisive for Pierre than this correspondence of features, was that his mother had risen, had turned her back, and made a point of putting away the sugar and wine in a cupboard, with more than reasonable slowness.

She had understood that he knew, or at least suspected!

"Pass it to me," said Roland.

Pierre held out the miniature, and his father drew a candle near to him, that he might take a good look. Then he murmured:

"Poor chap! To think that he was like that when we first knew him! By Jove! how time flies! He was a fine fellow, all the same, at that date; and so nice in his manners, was he not, Louise?"

As his wife did not answer, he went on:

"And what a calm temper! I never saw him in a bad humour. There! it is all over, and there's nothing left of him—except what he has bequeathed to Jean. In truth one may say of him that he showed himself a good friend, and faithful to the end."

Jean now stretched out his arm to take the portrait. He looked at it for a few moments, and then said regretfully:

"I don't recognize him one bit. I can only remember him with white hair."

And he returned the miniature to his mother. She threw at it a rapid glance, quickly averted, which seemed full of fear; and then said in her usual voice:

"That belongs to you now, Jean, my dear, since you are his heir. We will take it to your new rooms."

And as they were entering the drawing-room, she placed the miniature on the chimney-piece, near the clock, where it used to be of old.

Roland filled his pipe, Pierre and Jean lighted cigarettes. They used to smoke as a rule, Pierre walking up and down the room, Jean sitting deep in an easy chair, with his legs crossed. The father always sat astride of a chair, spitting from a distance into the fireplace.

Madame Roland, on a low seat, by a little table with a lamp on it, would do her embroidery, knit, or mark linen.

This evening she began a piece of fancy-work intended for Jean's rooms. It was a complicated piece, which in the first instance required her whole attention. Nevertheless, from time to time her eye, as it reckoned up the points, would look up, quickly, furtively, to the little

portrait of the dead man, which leaned against the clock. And the doctor, crossing the room in four or five strides, with his hands behind his back, and his cigarette between his lips, met his mother's look every time.

Any one would have said that they were watching each other, that war had been declared between them; and a painful, intolerable distress assailed the heart of Pierre. Tortured and yet satisfied, he said to himself: "How she must suffer, now, if she knows that I have got at the truth!" And every time he returned to the fireplace he paused a second or two to look at the fair face of Maréchal, to make it clear that a fixed idea had seized upon him. And this little portrait, smaller than an open hand, appeared like a living, malicious, formidable creature, which had suddenly entered the house and family.

All at once there was a ring at the street door. Madame Roland, usually so calm, started in such a way as to show the doctor how her nerves were disturbed. Then she said:

"That must be Madame Rosémilly."

And her anxious eyes again fell upon the chimney-piece.

Pierre understood, or thought that he understood, her terror and anguish. The looks of women are acute, their mind is agile, their thoughts are full of suspicion. When she who was coming in perceived the little unknown miniature, perhaps at first sight she would perceive the resemblance of this face to that of Jean. Then she would know and comprehend everything. He was afraid, suddenly and terribly afraid, that the shame would be detected; and turning round, as the door was opened, he took the little portrait, and slipped it under the clock, without his father and brother observing him.

Again encountering the eyes of his mother, they seemed to him to have become changed, troubled, and wild.

"Good day," said Madame Rosémilly. "I have come to drink a cup of tea with you."

But whilst they gathered round to ask how she was, Pierre disappeared through the open door.

When his departure was noticed, they were astonished.

Jean, being displeased, because he thought the young widow might be hurt, muttered :

“What a bear he is !”

Madame Roland explained :

“We must not look for his company; he is not well to-day, and he is tired from his trip to Trouville.”

“What of that ?” said Roland. “It is no excuse for his going off like a savage.”

Madame Rosémilly tried to smooth things over, saying :

“No, no; he went off in the English fashion. They always depart like that in society, when they go away early.”

“Oh !” Jean replied, “in society that may be so, but we do not treat our family in English fashion. My brother has been doing that sort of thing for some time past.”



VI



CHAPTER VI.

Nothing particular happened to the Rolands for a week or two. The father fished; Jean settled down in his apartments, assisted by his mother; Pierre, gloomy to excess, only made his appearance at meals.

His father asked him one evening :

“Why the deuce do you make yourself like a mute at a funeral? To-day is not the first time I have noticed it.”

“The burden of life weighs on me terribly,” replied the doctor.

The worthy man had no notion what he meant.

“Really,” he said, with a disconsolate air, “it is too stupid. Since this good luck of the legacy befell us, everybody seems unhappy. We might have had an accident, or gone into mourning for some one!”

“I am mourning for some one,” said Pierre.

“You? For whom?”

"Oh, some one you never knew. Some one I loved too well."

Roland thought there was a sweetheart in the question, some light creature to whom his son had paid attention. He asked :

"A woman, I suppose?"

"Yes, a woman."

"Dead?"

"No—worse than that. Lost."

"Ah!"

Though astonished by this unexpected confidence, which was made before his wife, and by the strange tone of his son, the old man did not dwell upon it, for he thought that these affairs had nothing to do with third parties.

Madame Roland looked as if she had heard nothing. She seemed ill, and was very pale. Several times already her husband, surprised to see her sitting as though she had fallen down on her chair, and to hear her pant as though she could not breathe, had said to her :

"Really, Louise, you don't look well. You must be tiring yourself too much by settling Jean in his rooms. Take some rest, I tell you. The rascal is not in a hurry, now he is rich."

She only shook her head, without replying.

To-day her paleness was so extreme that Roland again remarked it :

"Come, this won't do at all, my poor old girl. You must be looked after."

Then he turned to his son :

"You can see plainly that your mother is ill. Have you noticed her, if nothing else?"

"No," Pierre replied. "I had not observed that anything was the matter with her."

Then Roland was angry :

"Devil take it, this is enough to make a man swear! What is the good of being a doctor then, if you can't even see that your mother is unwell? Look at her, I tell you! Look at her! No, on my soul, you might die, and this doctor fellow would never suspect it!"

Madame Roland had begun to gasp. She was so ghastly that her husband cried :

“ She is going to faint ! ”

“ No no—it is nothing—it will go off—it is nothing.”

Pierre had approached her, and was looking at her fixedly.

“ Tell me ! What is wrong with you ? ” he asked.

She said again, in a low and hurried voice :

“ Nothing—nothing ! I assure you—nothing ! ”

Roland had gone to find some vinegar; he came back, and handed the bottle to his son.

“ There. Now you must relieve her. Have you tried her heart at all ? ”

And as Pierre stooped to feel her pulse, she drew back her hand with such a sudden action that she struck against a seat which was near her.

“ Come ! ” he said, coldly : “ let me attend to you, as you are ill.”

Then she sat up, and held out her arm. Her skin was very hot, and her heart beat wildly and irregularly. He muttered :

“ It is rather serious, to be sure. You must have soothing draughts. I will write you a prescription.”

And as he wrote, bent over his paper, a light sound of repressed sighs, of suffocation, of short impeded breath, made him suddenly turn round.

She was crying, with her hands over her face.

Roland, in despair, asked her :

“ Louise, Louise ! What is the matter ? Oh, what is the matter, dear ? ”

She made no answer, and seemed to be distracted by a deep and terrible grief.

Her husband tried to take her hands from her face. She resisted, crying :

“ No, no, no ! ”

He turned to his son :

“ What is the matter with her ? I have never seen her thus.”

“ It is nothing,” said Pierre, “ only a little nervous crisis.”

And it seemed to him as though his own heart were comforted to see her in this torment—that her grief lightened his resentment, and diminished his mother's due of blame. He looked at her like a judge satisfied with his task.

But all at once she rose, and rushed to the door with such a sudden movement that they could neither prevent nor keep her back. She ran to her room, and shut herself in.

Roland and the doctor remained face to face.

“Can you make anything out of it?” said the former.

“Yes. This comes of a little nervous trouble which often comes on at mamma's age. It is probable that she will have plenty more of such fits.”

And in fact she had more, almost every day, which Pierre seemed to bring on by a word, as though he held the secret of her strange and hidden unrest. He watched the intermitting calm of her face, and, with the skill of a torturer, called back by a word the grief which had been soothed for a moment.

And he suffered on his own part as much as she did. He suffered terribly from the fact that he no longer loved her, that he no longer respected her, that he was actually torturing her. When he had thoroughly renewed the bleeding wound laid open by him in the heart of the wife and mother, when he felt how wretched and desperate she was, he wandered off alone into the town, so tormented by remorse, so sore with pity, so disconsolate at having beaten her down by filial scorn, that he felt inclined to leap into the sea, to drown himself, and make an end of it.

Oh, how gladly he would have pardoned her now! But he could not do it, for he was unable to forget. If only he could have forborne to give her pain; but that was equally impossible whilst he suffered himself. He went in to meals, full of tender resolutions; then, as he beheld her, as soon as he saw her eye, once so direct and frank, now avoiding him, full of fear and bewildered, his blow descended in spite of himself, for he could not hold back the double-edged phrase that sprang to his lips.

The accursed secret, known to them alone, armed him against her. It was a poison which he carried in his veins, and which made him want to bite like a mad dog. Nothing now prevented him from constantly tormenting her, for Jean lived almost entirely at his new apartments, and came home only to dine and sleep with his family.

He often noticed the bitterness and violence of his brother, and attributed them to jealousy. He made up his mind to set things straight, and give him a lesson one day or other, for the life of the family was becoming wretched through these continual scenes. But as he lived apart now, he suffered less from these brutalities, and his love of a quiet life disposed him to patience. Fortune, moreover, had spoiled him, and his thoughts dwelt on little else than matters which specially concerned him. He would come in with his mind full of new and petty cares, absorbed by the cut of his coat, the shape of a felt hat, the proper size of his visiting cards. And he spoke persistently of the details of his suite, of the boards in his bedroom cupboard to keep his linen pressed, of boxes in the vestibule, of electric alarms arranged to prevent any secret invasion of his apartments.

He had decided that on the day when he finally took possession they would have a country party at Saint-Jouin, and come back after dinner to take tea at his rooms. Roland wanted to go by sea, but the distance and uncertainty of arrival of this route, if the wind were to get up, caused his plan to be rejected, and a break was hired for the occasion.

They set off about ten o'clock, so as to be in time for the midday meal. In the carriage, which was drawn by two fat and slow-trotting horses, the family of the Rolands, Madame Rosémilly, and Captain Beausire rode in silence, deafened by the noise of the wheels, and closed their eyes in a cloud of dust.

It was harvest time. Beside the dark green clover and the coarse green of the beetroots, the yellow corn brightened up the country with a blaze of gold and flaxen light. Here and there the ingathering was begun, and in the fields where the sickle had been set to work, men were seen swaying as they swept the ground with their long wing-like blade.

After a two hours' ride, the break turned to the left, passed by a

windmill at work, a melancholy dingy waif, half decayed and destined to destruction, the last survival of the old mills. Then it entered a pretty court-yard, and stopped before an attractive house, a hotel famous throughout the district.

The landlady, known as the fair Alphonsine, came out smiling into the porch, and held out her hand to the two ladies, who were hesitating over the rather high steps.

Under a tent, on the edge of the lawn shaded by apple trees, some visitors were already breakfasting. They were Parisians from Étretat; and inside the house could be heard voices, laughter, and a clatter of earthenware.

They had to eat in a private room, all the dining-rooms being full. Suddenly Roland saw some shrimping-nets on the wall.

“Ah! ah!” he cried, “do they catch prawns here?”

“Yes,” said Beausire. “In fact, this is where they catch the largest number along the coast.”

“By Jove! Let us go after breakfast!”

They found that the tide was out at three o'clock; and it was decided that everybody should spend the afternoon amongst the rocks, looking for shrimps.

They ate little, for fear of a rush of blood to the head when their feet were in the water. Besides, they wished to reserve themselves for dinner, which was ordered on a grand scale, and which was to be ready when they returned at six.

Roland could not restrain his impatience. He wanted to purchase the special nets employed in this kind of fishing, which are very like those used to catch butterflies. They are called *lanets*, and they are little pockets of thread, bound round a wooden ring, at the end of a long stick.

Alphonsine, smiling continually, lent him them. Then she assisted the two women to make a hasty toilette, so that they might not make their dresses wet. She brought them skirts, large woollen stockings, and Spanish sandals. The men took off their shoes and stockings, and bought from the local shoemaker some slippers and *sabots*.



Then they set off, nets on their shoulders and baskets on their backs. Madame Rosémilly was absolutely charming.

The skirt lent by Alphonsine, daintily caught up and held together by a stitch or two, so that she could run and jump without danger amongst the rocks, just shewed the ankle and the beginning of the calf. The figure was free, so as to make movement easy; she had found a large garden hat to cover her head, of yellow straw, with vast flaps, to which a branch of tamarind, holding back one edge, gave the swaggering look of a *mousquetaire*.

Since he came into his fortune, Jean had been asking himself whether he should marry her or not. Every time he saw her again he decided to make her his wife; then, when he was alone, he thought that waiting gave time for reflection. She was less wealthy than he was now, for she had only about twelve thousand francs a year; but it was in landed property, farms, sites in Havre, on the docks; and by and by this might be worth a great sum. Their fortunes thus were almost equal, and the young widow certainly pleased him vastly.

As he saw her walking in front of him to-day, he thought: "Now, I must make up my mind. Certainly I shall find nothing better."

They were going along a little sloping valley, descending from the village to the cliff; and the cliff at the end of the valley overlooked the sea from a height of eighty metres. Within the framework of the green sides of the valley running down to the right and left, a great triangle of water, silver-blue beneath the sun, was manifest at a distance, and a sail, scarcely visible, looked like an insect down below. The brilliant sky mingled with the waves so that it was impossible to distinguish where one ended or the other began; and the two women, walking in front of the men, exhibited their shapely figures against the clear horizon.

Jean, whose eyes had gathered brightness, saw the neat ankle, the slender and supple figure, and the tantalising big hat of Madame Rosémilly flitting before him; and the flight stimulated his desire, and drove him to one of those final resolutions which the timid and hesitating are wont to take all in a hurry. The warm air, in which was mingled the

smell of the hill-sides, of the gorse, of the clover and grass, and of the rocks left bare by the tide, encouraged whilst it mildly intoxicated him, and he became more and more decided at every step, every instant, at every glance directed towards the young woman's agile figure. He resolved to hesitate no longer, but to tell her that he loved her, and wanted her for his wife. The fishing would help him, and make a quiet interview easy; and moreover this would be a pretty framework, a delightful place to talk of love—their feet in a pool of limpid water, whilst they saw the long beards of the prawns disappear under the sea-weed.

When they came to the end of the valley, to the edge of the precipice, they saw a narrow path descending the cliff, and beneath them, between the sea and the foot of the cliff, about half-way across, a wonderful chaos of enormous rocks, shattered, overthrown, heaped one above another in a kind of overgrown and quivering plain, which disappeared from sight towards the south, created by ancient landslips. On this long belt of brushwood and turf, shaken out, one would suppose, by earthquakes, the fallen rocks seemed like the ruins of a mighty vanished city, once overlooking the ocean, and itself overlooked by the white and endless wall of the cliff.

“There now, that is beautiful!” said Madame Rosémilly, coming to a halt.

Jean had come up with her, and, with beating heart, offered her his hand to descend the narrow staircase hewn out of the rock.

They went on in advance, whilst Beausire offered his arm to Madame Roland, who was rendered dizzy by the abruptness.

Roland and Pierre came last, and the doctor had to lead his father, who was so troubled by giddiness that he let himself slip down on his haunches from step to step.

The young people, who were scampering down well to the front, moved rapidly; and all at once they perceived, running along the foot of a wooded slope, which made a resting-place about half-way down the descent, a thread of clear water springing from a little rent in the cliff. It formed at first a pool, and thence, falling in a cascade barely two

feet high, it ran off across the path, causing a bed of water-cress to shoot up, and disappeared in the bramble and grass, along the rock-strewn plain.

“Oh, how thirsty I am!” cried Madame Rosémilly.

But it was not easy to drink. She tried to fill the hollow of her hand with water, but it trickled away through her fingers. An idea struck Jean. He placed a stone on the ground, and she knelt on it, so as to bring her lips to the same level as the spring and drink from it direct.

When she raised her head covered with bright little drops which had been sprinkled in thousands over her skin, her hair, her eyebrows, and her bodice, Jean leaned over her and murmured :

“How lovely you are!”

“Will you have the goodness to hold your tongue?” she replied, in such a voice as one assumes in order to scold a child.

These were the first words which they exchanged of a gallant sort.

“Come along,” said Jean, in some concern, “before they overtake us.”

And indeed he could see, quite near to them by this time, the back of Captain Beausire, who was coming down backwards, supporting Madame Roland by both hands; and further up, Roland was still sliding down in a sitting posture, drawing himself along on his feet and elbows at a snail’s pace, whilst Pierre preceded him and superintended his movements.

The path, now less precipitous, became a sort of steep road which wound amongst the enormous blocks long since cast down from the hill-side. Madame Rosémilly and Jean set off at a run, and were soon amongst the shingle. They crossed it and reached the rocks. They stretched over a long and level surface covered with sea-weed out of which gleamed innumerable pools of water. The ebbing tide was far away below them, beyond that glutinous plain of sea-weed, glossy green and black.

Jean rolled up his trousers above his calves, and his sleeves up to the elbows, so that he might not trouble himself about the water. Then he cried “Forward!” and took a bold plunge into the first pond they came to.

The lady, more prudent, though likewise bent on taking the water by and by, went round the narrow basin with gingerly steps, for she slipped on the viscous weed.

"Can you see anything?" she cried.

"Yes! I see your face reflected in the water."

"If that is all you can see, you will not do much fishing."

He murmured tenderly :

"Of all the kinds of fishing I know, this is the one I like most." She laughed.

"Try it then! You will see how it slips through your net."

"Oh, but if you——"

"I want to see you catch shrimps—— and nothing else—— just now."

"You are too bad. Come on further; there is nothing here."

And he offered her his hand over the slippery rocks. She rested on him rather timidly, and he felt himself suddenly stormed by love, assailed by his longings, hungry for her, as though the sickness which had been implanted in him had awaited this day to come to a head.

They presently came to a deeper crevice, where, under the quivering water which flowed towards the distant sea by some invisible fissure, floated long, slender sea-plants, strange of hue, like pink and green threads of hair, which seemed to be swimming.

Madame Rosémilly cried out :

"Stop, stop! I see one, a big, a very big one, yonder!"

He saw it in his turn, and went boldly down into the hole, though he had to plunge up to his waist.

But the creature drew back gently before the net. Jean pushed her towards the sea-moss, feeling sure that he should catch her there. When she felt herself obstructed, she slipped with a sudden spring above the net, shot across the pool, and disappeared.

The young woman who was looking on at this attempt, all breathless, could not help exclaiming :

"Oh, clumsy!"

He was vexed, and with a careless movement drew his net through



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the weedy bottom. When he raised it to the surface of the water he saw within it three fat transparent shrimps, netted at hazard in their invisible hiding-place.

He presented them triumphantly to Madame Rosémilly, who dare not touch them, being afraid of the sharp and jagged horn by which their small head is armed.

But she made up her mind, and, catching between two fingers the thread-like end of their beard, she put them one after another into her basket, with a bit of sea-moss to keep them alive. Then, finding a pool of water not quite so deep, she went in timidly, a little out of breath from the cold which attacked her feet, and then began fishing herself. She was clever and dexterous, having a supple hand, and the hunter's instinct which he lacked. Almost at every stroke of the net she brought up creatures which had been deceived and taken in by the ingenious slowness of her pursuit.

Jean was finding nothing now, but he followed her step by step, brushed against her, leaned over her, feigning deep despair at his awkwardness, and anxiety to learn.

"Oh, show me how you do it!" he said, "show me!"

Then, as their faces were reflected near together in the clear water, which the black plants at the bottom converted into a limpid glass, Jean smiled at the face which looked at him from below, and at times, from the ends of his fingers threw it a kiss, which seemed to fall upon it.

"Ah, you are troublesome," said the lady. "My friend, you should never do two things at once."

"I am only doing one. I am loving you."

She straightened herself up, and said gravely :

"What has come over you these ten minutes? Have you lost your head?"

"No, I have not lost my head. I love you, and at last I have the courage to tell you so."

They were standing now in the salt lake which wetted them above

their ankles, and with their dripping hands supported on their nets they looked each other straight in the eyes.

She replied in a jesting and rather disconcerted tone :

“How foolish it is to talk to me about that at this moment. Can you not wait another day, and not spoil my fishing?”

“Forgive me,” he murmured, “but I could not be silent any longer. I have loved you ever so long. To-day you intoxicated me so much that I lost my balance.”

Then all on a sudden she seemed to fall in with him, to resign herself to speaking of business and renouncing pleasure.

“Let us sit down on this rock,” she said. “We shall be able to talk quietly.”

They clambered on the rock which rose above the level, and when they had sat down side by side, their feet hanging down, and in the full sunlight, she said :

“My dear friend, you are no longer a child, and I am no longer a young girl. We both know very well what is at stake, and we can weigh all the consequences of our actions. If you are resolved to-day to tell me that you love me, I naturally suppose that you want to marry me.”

He scarcely expected this plain statement of the situation, and answered foolishly :

“Of course.”

“And have you spoken to your father and mother?”

“No, I wished to know if you would have me.”

She held out her hand, which was still wet, and as he eagerly laid his own upon it, she said :

“For my part, I will gladly. I believe you are good and loyal. But do not forget that I would not go against the wishes of your parents.”

“Oh, do you think my mother has not foreseen anything, and that she would love you as she does if she were opposed to a marriage between us?”

“The fact is, I am a little upset.”

They were silent. He wondered, however, that she was so little upset, so common-sense. He expected a little gallant by-play, refusals which meant yes, a dainty comedy of love and fishing, amidst the plashing of the water. And it was all over, he was bound and married off in twenty words. They had no more to say to each other, since they were of the same mind, and they were now both a little embarrassed by what had passed so quickly between them, perhaps a little confused, not daring to speak or to fish, and not knowing what to do.

The voice of Roland came as a relief :

“Here are the young people! Here they are! Come and see Beausire. The fellow is emptying the sea.”

In fact the captain had made a wonderful catch. Wet to the ribs, he advanced from lake to lake, knowing the best places at a glance, and searching all the hollows under the sea-weed with a slow and steady movement of his net.

And the fine transparent shrimps, of a light gray colour, fluttered in the hollow of his hand when he took them coolly to throw into his basket.

Madame Rosémilly, surprised and delighted, did not leave him again, imitating him to the best of her ability, almost forgetting her promise and Jean, who moodily followed her, to abandon herself entirely to the childish joy of catching the shrimps under the floating sea-weed.

Roland suddenly cried :

“Here is Madame Roland coming.”

She had remained alone with Pierre on the beach, for neither of them desired to amuse themselves by running amongst the rocks, and wading in the pools; and yet they hesitated to remain together. She feared him; and her son feared both for her and for himself the cruelty which he could not master. So they sat close together on the shingle.

And both of them, under the heat of the sun just cooled by the sea air, before the broad soft horizon of blue water streaked with silver, thought the same thought : “How pleasant it would have been here once on a time.”

She dare not speak to Pierre, convinced that he would reply with something hard; and he dare not speak to his mother, knowing also that in spite of himself he would do it in a violent fashion.

With the end of his cane he was fidgetting with the round pebbles, turning them over, and striking them. She, with absent eyes, had taken up three or four little stones, which she passed from one hand to the other with slow mechanical action. Then her undecided gaze, which had been wandering in front of her, saw amongst the sea-weed her son Jean, fishing with Madame Rosémilly. Then she followed them, watched their movements, dimly understanding with her maternal instinct that they were not talking on every-day subjects. She saw them bending side by side when they looked at each other in the water, and stand face to face when they were searching each other's hearts, then climb on the rock to exchange their vows.

Their figures stood out clearly, alone on the horizon, and, in this wide expanse of sky, sea, and cliff, looked grand and symbolic.

Pierre also was looking at them, and a dry smile suddenly curled his lips. Without turning towards him Madame Roland said :

“What is the matter?”

He sneered again.

“I am learning a lesson. I am teaching myself how a husband prepares himself to be duped.”

She had a rush of anger, of revolt, shocked at the expression, and exasperated because she thought she understood him.

“For whom do you say that?”

“For Jean, of course! It is comical to see them so.”

She murmured in a low tone, trembling with emotion :

“Oh, Pierre, how cruel you are! That woman is virtue itself. Your brother could not find a better.”

He began to laugh aloud, a forced and broken laugh.

“Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Virtue itself! All women are virtue itself—and all men are cuckolds. Ha, ha, ha!”

Without answering she got up, walked quickly down the slope of the

shingle, and at the risk of slipping and falling in the hole concealed by the sea-weed, whereby she might easily have broken a leg or an arm, she left him almost at a run, striding over the pools without seeing them, straight before her, towards her other son.

Seeing her approach, Jean cried out :

“ Well, mamma, have you made up your mind at last ? ”

Not answering his question she grasped his arm, as though she would have said : “ Save me ! Defend me ! ”

He saw her trouble, and, much surprised, cried :

“ How pale you are ! What is the matter ? ”

She stammered out :

“ I nearly fell. I am afraid, on these rocks. ”

Then Jean led her, supported her, told her about their fishing, in order to arouse her interest. But as she scarcely listened to him, and as he greatly wanted to confide in somebody, he drew her further away, and said in a low voice :

“ Guess what I have done ? ”

“ But — but — I cannot say. ”

“ Guess. ”

“ I — I can't. ”

“ Well, I have told Madame Rosémilly that I desire to make her my wife. ”

Still she did not reply. Her head was buzzing, her mind was in such distress that she could barely comprehend anything.

“ Your wife ? ” she repeated.

“ Yes. Did I do well ? She is lovely, is she not ? ”

“ Yes — lovely — You have done well. ”

“ Then I have your approval ? ”

“ Yes — you have my approval. ”

“ How oddly you say that. One would think that — that — you are not pleased. ”

“ Oh yes — I am pleased. ”

“ Quite sure ? ”

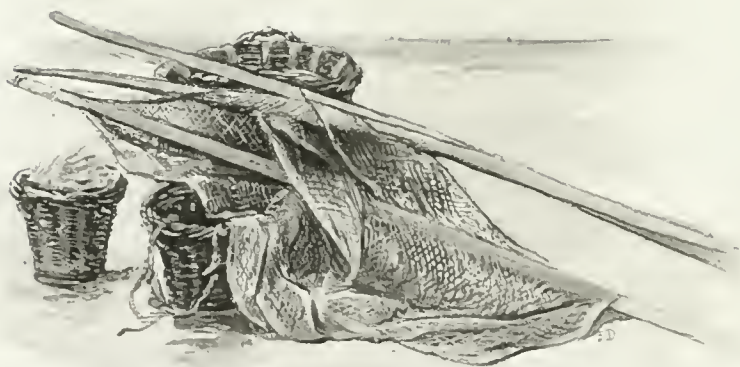
“ Quite sure. ”

And to convince him of it, she clasped him in her arms, and kissed him on the lips, with a mother's full kiss.

Then, when she had dried the tears from her eyes, she saw on the beach below a body stretched on its face like a corpse. It was her other son, Pierre, who was plunged in a despairing reverie.

Then she took her younger one, Jean, further away still, close to the waves, and they spoke for a long time of the marriage on which he had set his heart.

The rising sea drove them back towards the fishers, whom they rejoined; and so everybody went back to the hill-foot. Pierre, who pretended that he had been asleep, was roused; and dinner, drowned in wine, occupied them for hours.



VII



CHAPTER VII.

As they came home in the break, all the men went to sleep except Jean. Beausire and Roland sank down every five minutes on a neighbouring shoulder, which pushed them off with a jerk. Then they sat up straight, ceased to snore, opened their eyes, muttered: "Lovely weather," and sank down almost immediately on the other side.

When they entered Havre their drowsiness was so great that they had much difficulty in shaking it off, and Beausire even declined to go to Jean's rooms, where tea awaited them. He had to be set down at his own door. The young advocate was going to sleep in his new apartments for the first time; and he took a great, almost childish joy in showing his betrothed the residence which she was soon to occupy.

The maid had gone, Madame Roland having undertaken to boil the water and attend to them. She did not like to leave servants waiting up, for fear of fire.

No one but herself, her son, and the workmen had hitherto entered; so that the surprise was complete when they saw how well things looked.

In the vestibule, Jean asked them to wait. He wanted to light the candles and lamps, and he left Madame Rosémilly with his father and brother in the darkness. Then, opening the great folding-doors, he bade them enter. The glazed gallery, lighted up by a lustre, and the painted glass half concealed by palms, india-rubber plants, and flowers, looked at first like a stage effect. There was a moment of wonder. Roland, marvelling at the splendour, exclaimed: "By Jove!" and felt inclined to clap his hands, as though he were present at a transformation scene.

Then they went into the first drawing-room, which was small, hung with old gold hangings, like the upholstery of the seats. The great drawing-room for consultations, being very simple and of a pale salmon colour, looked imposing.

Jean sat down in the easy chair before his desk which was laden with books, and in a grave voice, a little forced, said:

"Yes, Madame, the legal texts are distinct, and after the concurrence of which I informed you, they beget in me the absolute certainty that within three months the affair of which we have been speaking will arrive at a fortunate termination."

He looked at Madame Rosémilly, who, looking at his mother, broke into a smile, and Madame Roland took her hand and pressed it.

Jean, beaming with joy, cut a schoolboy caper, and cried:

"How well the voice travels. This drawing-room would be capital to plead in."

Then he began to declaim:

"If humanity alone, if that sentiment of natural kindness which we experience before every kind of suffering, were needed to supply a motive for the acquittal which we ask of you, we should make an appeal to your pity, gentlemen of the jury, to your paternal or simply human hearts; but we have the law on our side, and it is exclusively a question of law which we are going to raise before you."

Pierre looked at this residence which might have been his own, and

he was irritated by his brother's extravagances, voting him decidedly too foolish, and wanting in wit.

Madame Roland opened a door on the right.

"Here is the bedroom," she said.

The hangings were in Rouen cretonne, made to imitate the old Normandy linen. A Louis Quinze design, a shepherdess in a medallion enclosed between the united beaks of two doves, gave to the walls, the curtains, the bed, the seats, a very pretty, dainty, and rural aspect.

"Oh, this is charming," said Madame Rosémilly, turning a little serious as she entered this room.

"Do you like it?" said Jean.

"Vastly."

"You can't think how glad I am to hear you say so."

They exchanged an instantaneous look, with much tenderness and trust implied in it.

Nevertheless, she was a little troubled and confused in this room, which was to be her nuptial chamber. She had observed as she came that the bed was very wide, a regular family bedstead, which had doubtless been selected by Madame Roland, because she had foreseen and desired her son's speedy marriage; and yet this forethought of the mother pleased her, and seemed to show her that she would be welcomed in the family.

Then, when they had returned to the drawing-room, Jean suddenly opened the door on the left, and showed the round dining-room, lighted by three windows, and decorated in Japanese fashion. Mother and son had employed in it all the capricious taste of which they were capable. This room, with its bamboo furniture, its Chinese vases, gold-spangled silks, transparent blinds on which the glass beads looked like drops of water, fans nailed to the walls as supports for the curtains; with its screens, sabres, masks, storks imitated with real feathers, with all its pretty knick-knacks of porcelain, wood, paper, ivory, mother-of-pearl, and bronze, had the pretentious and affected look which awkward hands and untrained eyes give to things which require the utmost tact, taste, and artistic education. Yet it was the room which was most admired.

Pierre alone showed some reserve, with a slightly bitter irony, by which his brother was a little hurt.

On the table were fruits arranged in pyramids, cakes built up in monuments. Nobody was hungry. Then, at the end of an hour, Madame Rosémilly took her leave.

It was decided that M. Roland should see her home and go off with her at once, whilst Madame Roland, in the absence of a maid, should cast a mother's last look over the apartments, that her son might not be in need of anything.

"Shall I come back for you?" said Roland.

She hesitated; then said :

"No, my dear, go to bed. Pierre will take me home."

As soon as they were gone, she blew out the candles, locked up the cakes, sugar, and liqueurs in a sideboard of which she gave the key to Jean; then went into the bedroom, turned down the coverings, saw that the carafe was filled with fresh water, and the window secured.

Pierre and Jean had remained in the little drawing-room, the latter still chilled by the criticism which had been passed on his taste, and the other more and more exasperated to see his brother in this residence. Both sat and smoked in silence. Pierre suddenly jumped up.

"By Jove," he said, "the widow did look washed out to-night. Picnics don't suit her."

Jean was suddenly attacked by one of those quick and furious rages to which good-natured men are subject when their heart has received a wound.

He was so strongly moved that his breath failed him, and he stammered :

"I ask you henceforth not to say 'the widow' when you speak of Madame Rosémilly."

Pierre turned to him with a lofty air.

"You seem to be giving me orders. Do you happen to be going mad?"

Jean had stood up, too.

"I am not going mad, but I have had enough of your way of treating me."



"Treating you!" sneered the other. "Have you become a part of Madame Rosémilly?"

"I would have you know that Madame Rosémilly is to be my wife."

Pierre laughed more loudly.

"Aha! Capital! Now I understand why I am no longer to call her 'the widow.' But you have taken an odd way of announcing your marriage."

"I forbid you to jest—do you understand? I forbid it."

Jean had approached his brother, with tremulous voice, exasperated by the irony which assailed the woman whom he loved and had chosen.

But Pierre became equally furious. All the impotent wrath which had gathered in him, the repressed rancour, the rebellious feelings which he had been holding in restraint, and the silent despair, leaped to his head, and overwhelmed him like a stroke of apoplexy.

"Dare you?—Dare you?—And I order you to hold your tongue. Do you understand? I order you."

Jean, taken aback by this violence, was silent for a few moments, seeking, in the mental disturbance which fury creates in us, for the thing, the phrase, the word, which might sting his brother to the heart.

He replied, studiously curbing himself so as to strike harder, speaking more slowly so as to speak with more point :

"I have long known you were jealous of me, ever since the day when you began to talk of 'the widow,' because you thought that would hurt me."

Pierre gave one of those strident and scornful laughs which were usual with him.

"Aha! Good God! Jealous of you! What, I?—I?—And of what? Of what, in Heaven's name?—Of your face or your mind?"

But Jean felt sure that he had touched the sore point.

"Yes, you are jealous of me, and you have been jealous from my infancy, and you became furious when you saw that this lady preferred me and would have nothing to say to you."

Pierre, enraged by this idea, stammered out :

“I?—I? Jealous of you? And on account of that silly creature, that dolt, that fat goose?”

Jean seeing that his blows went home, continued :

“And how about that day when you tried to row harder than I could, in the *Perle*? And all you said before her, to get her good opinion? Why, you are bursting with jealousy. And then when I got this legacy, you were enraged, and hated me, and you have shown it in every way, and have made every one suffer for it; and you can’t let an hour pass without spitting out the bile that chokes you.”

Pierre clenched his fists with fury, almost irresistibly impelled to leap on his brother and take him by the throat.

“Oh, be quiet!” he said, “and don’t talk to me of that fortune.”

“Jealousy oozes out of your skin,” cried Jean. “You never say a word to my father, my mother, or myself, without its breaking out. It is because you are jealous that you pretend to despise me. You pick a quarrel with everybody because you are jealous. And now that I am rich, you cannot restrain yourself; you have become venomous, and you torture our mother as if it were her fault!”

Pierre had fallen back to the chimney-piece, his mouth half open, his eye dilated, a prey to one of those mad rages which make men commit crimes. He repeated in a low, panting voice :

“Be quiet, be quiet, I tell you!”

“I won’t. I have been wanting for a long time to tell you all I thought; you have given me the opportunity, and so much the worse for you. I love a woman, and as soon as you see it, you begin to rail at her before me, you drive me to extremities; so much the worse for you. But I will break your serpent’s teeth, I will make you respect me.”

“Respect you?”

“Yes, me!”

“Respect you! You, who have dishonoured us all by your greed!”

“What do you say? Repeat that—— repeat it!”

“I say that people don’t accept a patrimony from one man when they are passing as sons of another.”

Jean was motionless, not understanding. He was paralysed by the insinuation of which he only half gathered the meaning.

"What do you mean to say?— Repeat it again."

"I say that everybody is whispering and spreading it about that you are the son of the man who has left you his fortune. Well, a fellow with any spirit would not accept money which dishonours his mother."

"Pierre—Pierre—Pierre! Can you suppose it? It is you—you! who say this infamous thing?"

"Yes, it is I— it is I. Could you not see that I have been dying of grief on this account, for a month and more—that I pass my nights without sleeping and my days in hiding, like a wild beast—that I no longer know what I am saying or doing, nor what is to become of me, I am in such pain, so mad with shame and grief? For I guessed it at first, and now I am sure of it."

"Pierre, be quiet! Our mother is in the next room! Think, she may hear us— she does hear us."

But he was bound to disburden himself. He went through everything, his suspicions, his arguments, his struggles, his certainty, not forgetting the story of the portrait, which had again disappeared.

He spoke in short, broken, incoherent phrases, like the talk of a madman. He seemed now to have forgotten Jean, and his mother in the next room. He spoke as though nobody were listening to him, because he had to speak, because he had suffered too much, and had too long bound up and concealed his wound. It had grown like a tumour, and the tumour had burst. He began to walk up and down, as was his wont; and with his eyes staring straight before him, gesticulating, in a frenzy of despair, his throat choked with sobs, with recurrences of his own self-hatred, he spoke as if he wanted to confess his misery and the misery of his relatives, and as if he would have cast his pain into the invisible deaf air to which his words were borne.

Jean, who was overwhelmed, and almost convinced out of hand by the blind energy of his brother, had set his back against the door behind which he thought that their mother must have heard them.

She could not go out; she would have to come through the drawing-room. She had not returned. It must have been because she dare not.

Pierre all at once, stamping on the floor with his foot, cried out :
“Oh, I am a brute to say this!”

And he rushed, bareheaded, down the stairs.

The noise of the outer door, which closed with a bang, aroused Jean from the deep torpor into which he had fallen. A few seconds had passed, longer than hours, and his soul had been engulfed in idiotic stupefaction. He felt that he must think and act immediately, but he waited, not even wishing any longer to understand, to know, to recollect, out of fear, and weakness, and cowardice. He was of the race of the temporizers, who are always putting off till to-morrow; and when he had to take an instant resolution, he still instinctively tried to gain a few moments. But the profound silence which surrounded him now, after the vociferations of Pierre, the sudden silence of walls and furniture, with this bright light of the six candles and two lamps, terrified him so much that he was disposed to run away also.

Then he roused his thoughts and his heart, and tried to think.

Throughout his life he had never encountered a difficulty. There are men who let things go like running water. He had learned at school sedulously, in order to escape punishment, and had gone through his law classes with regularity, because his existence was a calm one. Everything in the world seemed natural to him, without otherwise arousing his notice. He liked order, propriety, repose, by virtue of his temperament, having no duplicity in his mind; and in face of this catastrophe he was like a man who falls into the water without having learned to swim.

At first he tried to doubt. His brother must have lied, through hatred and jealousy. And yet how could he have been such a wretch as to say such a thing of their mother, unless he had himself been driven mad by despair? And Jean retained in his ears, in his eyes, in his nerves, at the bottom of his heart, certain words and cries of suffering, certain tones and gestures of Pierre, so full of pain that they were irresistible—as irrefragable as certainty.

He was too crushed to move or exercise his will. His distress was becoming intolerable; and he felt that his mother was there behind the door, having heard everything, and that she was waiting for him.

What was she doing? No stir, no rustle, no breath, no sigh revealed the presence of a living creature behind that screen of wood. Could she have gone away? But how? If she had gone—— she must have thrown herself from the window into the street!

He was assailed by a fit of terror, so quick and overmastering that he burst in rather than opened the door, and dashed into his bedroom.

It seemed to be empty. A single candle lighted it.

Jean leaped to the window. It was closed, and the shutters were fast. He returned, swept all the corners with anxious eyes, and then noticed that the curtains of the bed had been drawn. He ran and opened them. His mother was stretched upon his bed, with her face buried in the pillow, which she had folded with her hands over her head, so that she might hear no more. At first he thought she was smothered. Then, having grasped her by the shoulders, he turned her round. She did not loosen her hold of the pillow which concealed her face, and which she had seized with her teeth to prevent her crying.

But as he touched the stiffened form, the rigid arms, he received the shock of her indescribable anguish. The energy and force with which she held the pillow with fingers and teeth over her mouth and eyes and ears, so that he might not see or speak to her, made him divine by his own sensation how profoundly it is possible to suffer. And his heart, his simple heart, was distracted with pity. He was not a judge, not even a pitying judge; he was a man full of weakness, and a son full of tenderness. He remembered nothing of what his brother had said to him; he neither reasoned nor discussed; he simply touched with his hands the motionless body of his mother, and as he could not take the pillow from her face, he kissed her dress, and cried :

“Mother! Mother! My poor mother, look at me!”

She would have seemed dead, if all her limbs had not been transfixed with an almost insensible tremor, like the vibration of a stretched cord.

"Mother, mother," he repeated. "listen to me. That is not true. I am sure that it is not true."

There was a spasm, a suffocating sound, and then all at once she sobbed beneath her pillow. Immediately all her nerves were relaxed, her rigid muscles grew soft, her fingers extending let the pillow drop, and she suffered him to see her face.

She was perfectly pale, perfectly white, and from her closed eyelids there fell tear after tear. Claspng her round the neck, he kissed her eyes, slowly, with long, desolate kisses; and he kept on saying :

"Mother, dear mother, I am sure it is not true. Do not cry; I know it—It is not true!"

She raised herself, and sat looking at him with one of those efforts of heroism which we need now and then, to meet death with; and she said :

"No, my child! It is true!"

And they remained facing each other, without a word. For a few seconds again she choked, straining her throat as he turned aside to breathe; then she conquered herself again, and continued :

"It is true, my child. Why should I tell a lie? It is true. You would not believe me if I lied."

She looked like a mad woman. Seized with terror, he fell on his knees beside the bed, murmuring :

"Be silent, mamma; be silent!"

She rose with terrible resolution and energy.

"But I have no more to say to you, my child. Farewell!"

She walked to the door. He seized her in his arms, crying : "What would you do, mamma? Where are you going?"

"I do not know. How should I know? There is nothing I can do—— for I am all, all alone."

She fought to escape him. Holding her back, he could say nothing but the one word :

"Mamma—mamma—mamma!"

And as she struggled to break from him, she said :



"No, no, I am not your mother now. I am nothing any longer to you, to anybody—nothing—nothing any more! You have no longer a father or a mother, my poor child. Farewell!"

He felt at once that if he let her go he should never see her again. He raised her, carried her to a couch, made her sit down, and then, kneeling by her, and making a chain of his arms, cried :

"You shall not go, mamma. I love you, and I will guard you. I will guard you for ever; for you are mine."

With broken voice she murmured :

"No, no, my poor child, it is no longer possible. To-night you weep with me—to-morrow you will cast me out. You would never pardon me—never."

He replied with such a rush of sincere love : "What, I? I? How little you know me!" that she uttered a cry, took his head between her open hands, drew him vehemently towards her, and kissed him frantically on the face.

Then she was motionless, with her cheek pressed to the cheek of her son, feeling the heat of his flesh through his beard; and she whispered in his ear :

"No, my little Jean. You would not forgive me to-morrow. You think you would, but you are mistaken. You have forgiven me to-night, and that forgiveness has saved my life. But you must not see me again."

He continued to repeat, as he clasped her close :

"Mamma, do not say that!"

"Yes, my child, I must go away. I know not where, nor how I shall do it, nor what I shall say, but it must be. I should not dare to look at you again, nor to kiss you. Do you not understand?"

Then he, in his turn, whispered in her ear :

"My little mother, you shall remain, because I wish it, because I have need of you. And you shall swear at once to obey me."

"No, my child."

"Oh, mamma, it must be. You hear? It must be!"

"No, my child, it is impossible. It would be to condemn us both to hell. I know what that torment is, I have known it for a month. You are touched; but when this is over, when you look at me as Pierre looks, when you recall what I have said to you!— Oh!—my little Jean; think— think that I am your mother."

"You shall not leave me, mother. I have nothing but you."

"But consider, my son, that we shall not be able to look at each other without a blush, without my feeling that I must die of shame, and without your eyes causing mine to fall."

"That is not true, mamma!"

"Yes, yes, yes, it is true! Oh, I have understood, be sure, all the struggles of your poor brother, every one of them, from the first day. Now when I think I hear his step in the house my heart leaps as though it would burst through my breast. When I hear his voice, I feel that I am ready to swoon away. But I had you left! Now I have you no longer. Oh! my little Jean, do you think I could live between you both?"

"Yes, mamma. I will love you so much that you shall think of it no more."

"Oh! Oh! As if that were possible!"

"Yes, it is possible."

"How do you suppose it is possible that I should think of it no more, between your brother and you? Would you think of it no more?"

"I swear that I would not."

"You will think of it every hour of the day."

"No; I swear it. And besides, listen to me. If you go away I shall enlist, and get myself shot."

She was shocked by the boyish threat, and pressed Jean in her arms, caressing him with passionate tenderness.

He continued :

"I love you better than you think—oh, much better, much better! Now, be reasonable. Make an effort to stay only for eight days. Will you promise me eight days? You cannot refuse me that."

She laid her hands on Jean's shoulders, and, holding him at arms' length, said :

"My child—— let us try and be calm, and not carried away by our feelings. First, let me speak to you. If I were once to hear from your lips what I have been hearing for a month from your brother; if I were once to see in your eyes what I read in his; if I were to guess by a single word that I am odious to you as I am to him—one hour afterwards, understand me, one hour afterwards—I should be gone for ever."

"Mother, I swear to you——"

"Let me finish. For a month I have suffered all that a woman can suffer. From the moment when I understood that your brother, my other son, suspected me, that he was divining the truth minute by minute, every instant of my life has been a martyrdom which it is impossible to make you understand."

Her voice was so full of pain that the contagion of her torture filled Jean's eyes with tears.

He wanted to kiss her, but she pushed him back.

"Let me alone. Listen. I have still much to tell you, that you may understand—— but you will not understand. It is this. If I were to stay, it would be necessary—— No, I cannot!"

"Tell me, mamma, tell me."

"Well! I will then. At least I shall not have deceived you. You wish that I should stay with you, do you not? To make that possible, that we should be able to see each other still, speak to each other, see each other daily in the house—for I dare no longer open a door, for fear of finding your brother on the other side—to do this, it is necessary, not that you should pardon me (nothing hurts more than a pardon), but that you should not remember against me anything which I have done. You must feel yourself strong enough, different enough from everybody else, to admit that you are not Roland's son, without blushing for that, and without despising me! I have suffered enough. I have suffered too much; I can suffer no more—no more. And it is not a question

of to-day, be sure of that; I have suffered long. But you will never come to understand that. If we are to be able to live together still, and embrace each other, my little Jean, say to yourself that, if I was your father's mistress, I was yet more his wife, and his true wife—that in my heart of hearts I am not ashamed of it, that I regret nothing, that I love him still, dead though he be, that I shall love him for ever, that I have never loved another, that he has been my whole life, my only joy, my only hope and consolation—everything, everything, everything to me for oh such a long time! Listen, my little one! Before God, who hears me, I should never have had any good thing in existence if I had never met him—never anything; neither tenderness, nor sweetness, nor a single one of those hours that make us regret to wake again. Nothing! I owe all to him! I have had only him in the world—and after him you two, your brother and you. Without you, it would all be empty, black and empty as the night. I should never have loved anything, known anything, desired anything. I should not have wept; for I have wept, my little Jean. Oh, yes! I have wept, since we came here. I had given myself up to him entirely, body and soul, for ever, to my joy; and for more than ten years I was his wife, as he was my husband, before the God who made us for each other; and then I understood that he loved me less. He was always kind and thoughtful, but I was no longer what I had been for him. It was over! Oh, how I wept!—How miserable and deceptive is life! Nothing lasts. And we came here; and I never saw him again; he never came. He used to promise in all his letters—— I constantly expected him—and I never saw him again. And now he is dead! But he loved us still, since he thought of you. I shall love him to my last breath, and I shall never forswear him; and I love you because you are his child, and I could never be ashamed of him before you! Do you understand? I could not! If you wish me to stay, you must accept the fact that you are his son, and we must speak of him sometimes, and you must love him a little, and we must think of him when we look at each other. If you will not—if you cannot—farewell, my little

one; it is impossible that we should remain together then! I will act as you decide."

Jean replied in a gentle voice :

"Stay, mother."

She clasped him in her arms and began to weep again; then, cheek to cheek, she went on :

"Yes; but Pierre? What are we to do about him?"

"We shall think of something," said Jean, "you can no longer live with him."

At the thought of her eldest-born, she was contracted with anguish

"No, I cannot any longer! No! No!"

And throwing herself on Jean's breast, she cried, in her soul's distress :

"Save me from him, my little one! Save me; do something, I know not what! Think—save me."

"Yes, mamma; I will think."

"At once—you must! At once—do not leave me! I am so afraid of him—so afraid!"

"Yes, I will find a way. I promise you."

"Oh, but quick, quick! You do not understand what I feel when I see him."

Then she murmured low in his ear :

"Keep me in this place, with you "

He hesitated, reflected, and with his common sense perceived the danger of this complication.

But he had to reason long, to discuss and combat with precise arguments her insanity and terror.

"Only to-night," she said; "only to-night. You can say to Roland to-morrow that I was ill."

"It is not possible, for Pierre has gone back. Come, be brave. I will arrange everything, I promise, to-morrow. I will be with you by nine o'clock. Come, put on your bonnet. I will take you home!"

"I will do what you wish," she said, with a submissiveness which was at once childish, timid, and grateful.

She tried to stand up, but the shock had been too severe, her legs would no longer support her.

Then he made her take a warm, sweet, drink, and use her smelling-salts, and he bathed her temples with vinegar. She let him do it, feeling herself exhausted, and comforted as after an illness.

At last she was able to walk, and she took his arm. Three o'clock was striking when they passed the town-hall.

Before the door of her house he embraced her, and said :

“Good-bye, mother, keep up your courage.”

She went up the silent stairs with cautious steps, entered her room, hastily undressed, and slipped in by the snoring Roland, with the long-forgotten agitation of other days.

Pierre was the only one in the house who was not asleep, and he had heard her return.



VIII



CHAPTER VIII.

When he had returned to his room, Jean sank wearily on a sofa ; for the griefs and cares which made his brother want to rush off and take flight like a hunted animal, acting in the opposite sense upon his somnolent nature, racked his legs and arms. He felt himself so relaxed that he could not move, could not get into bed. He was relaxed in body and mind, crushed and desolate. He was not wounded, as Pierre had been, in the simplicity of his filial love, in that secret dignity which clothes a proud heart, but overwhelmed by a blow of destiny which at the same time threatened his dearest interests.

When his soul at last had grown calm, when his thoughts had been cleared like driven and agitated water, he faced the situation which had been unfolded to him. If he had learned the secret of his birth in any other manner, he would certainly have been angered, and would have felt

a profound grief ; but after his quarrel with his brother, after that violent and brutal denunciation which had shaken his nerves, the acute suffering and confession of his mother left him without the energy to rebel. The shock to his sensibility had been strong enough to carry off, by an irresistible compassion, all the prejudices and sacred susceptibilities of natural morality. Besides, he was not one of the men who resist. He did not like to fight against anybody, and still less against himself ; he therefore resigned himself ; and by instinctive inclination, by an inborn love of repose, and of a pleasant and tranquil life, he immediately worried himself over the perturbations which were about to surround him, and invade him personally. He saw that they were inevitable, and, in order to keep them off, he resolved upon vast efforts of energy and activity. It was necessary that the difficulty should be solved forthwith, the very next day ; for, again, he now and then felt that imperious craving for immediate solutions which constitutes the whole force of the weak, who are incapable of a long activity of the will. His lawyer-like mind, accustomed to disentangle and examine complicated situations, and matters of private concern in families overtaken by trouble, at once recognized all the immediate consequences of his brother's state of mind. He faced the issues, in spite of his feelings, from a professional point of view, as though he had been ordering the future relations of clients after a catastrophe of a moral description. It was certain that continued dealings with Pierre had become impossible for him. He could easily avoid him by remaining at home, but then it was impossible that their mother should continue to live under the same roof with her eldest son.

He meditated for a long time, motionless, on his cushions, constructing and rejecting combinations, without finding one to satisfy him.

But suddenly an idea seized him—"Would an honest man keep this fortune which had fallen to him ?"

He answered "No," at first, and resolved to give it to the poor. That was hard—so much the worse. He would sell his furniture, and work like any one else—like all men at the outset of their lives. This manly and painful resolution having whipped up his courage, he rose and

stood with his face to the window. He had been poor, and was to become poor again. It would not kill him, after all. His eyes looked at the gas jet which burned in front of him from the other side of the street. Now, as a woman passed slowly on the pavement, he suddenly thought of Madame Rosémilly, and received in his heart the shock of deep feeling which springs up within us after a cruel thought. All the disheartening consequences of his decision appeared before him at the same moment. He must give up the idea of marrying this woman, renounce happiness, renounce everything. Could he act thus, now that he had engaged himself to her? She had accepted him, knowing that he was rich. If he were poor she might still accept him; but had he the right to expect it of her, to impose this sacrifice upon her? Would it not be better to keep this money as a deposit, which he could give to the poor later on? And in his soul, whose selfishness took honest disguises, all his masked interests strove and contended. His first scruples gave place to ingenious arguments, then reappeared, then again were effaced. Once more he sat down, groping for a definite motive, an overpowering pretext to fix his hesitation and convince his innate sense of right. Twenty times he put this question to himself: "Since I am the son of this man, since I know it and accept the position, is not it natural that I should also accept his bequest?" But the argument could not stifle the "No," pronounced by his inward conscience. Suddenly the thought: "Since I am not the son of the man whom I believed to be my father, I can no longer accept anything from him, alive or dead. That would be neither right nor fair. It would be robbing my brother." This new way of looking at things having consoled him, and appeased his conscience, he returned to the window. "Yes," he said to himself, "I must renounce the family fortune—leave it untouched to my brother, because I am not the son of his father. That is just. Then is it not also just that I should keep my own father's money?"

Having recognized that he could not profit by Roland's fortune, having decided to abandon it absolutely, he consented and resolved to keep that of Maréchal; for by repudiating both one and the other, he would be reduced to simple mendicity.

This delicate matter once arranged, he came back to the question of Pierre's presence in his parents' house. How was he to be kept away? He was despairing of finding a practical solution, when the whistle of a steamer coming into port seemed to give him an answer by suggesting an idea.

Then he threw himself, dressed as he was, on his bed, and dreamed until day came.

About nine o'clock he went out to make sure if the execution of his plan was possible. Next, after a few walks and a few visits, he went to his mother's house. She was waiting for him, shut up in her room.

"If you had not come," she said, "I should never have dared to go down."

Presently Roland was heard crying on the stairs :

"Is there to be nothing to eat to-day, *nom d'un chien*?"

Nobody answered, and he shouted :

"Joséphine, what the devil are you doing?"

The maid's voice replied from the recesses of the basement :

"Please sir, what is it?"

"Where is Madame?"

"Madame is upstairs with M'sien Jean."

Then he bawled, raising his head upwards :

"Louise!"

Madame Roland half opened her door, and answered :

"What, my dear?"

"Nothing to eat, *nom d'un chien*!"

"There, my dear, we are coming."

Then she went down, followed by Jean.

As M. Roland saw the young man, he cried :

"Ah, so you are there! Already sick of your rooms?"

"No, father, but I wanted to have some talk with mamma this morning."

Jean came down with outstretched hand, and when he felt the paternal grasp of the old man tighten on his fingers, a strange and unforeseen



emotion seized upon him—an emotion of separation and farewells, without hope of return.

“Pierre has not come down?” asked Madame Roland.

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

“No, but he is always late, so much the worse for him! Let us begin without him.”

She turned to Jean :

“You should go and fetch him, my child. It hurts him when we do not wait for him.”

“Yes, mamma, I will go.”

And the young man went out. He sprang upstairs, with the feverish haste of a timid man about to fight.

When he knocked at the door, Pierre cried :

“Come in.”

He entered. The other was writing, bent over the table.

“Good morning,” said Jean.

Pierre got up.

“Good morning.”

And they held out their hands as though nothing had happened.

“Are you not coming down to breakfast?”

“Why——the fact is——I have a lot of work to do.”

The voice of the elder brother trembled, and his anxious eye clearly asked the younger what he meant to do.

“They are waiting for you.”

“Is——is our mother down?”

“Yes. Indeed it was she who sent me to fetch you.”

“Oh, then I will come.”

Before the door of the dining-room he hesitated to show himself first ; then he opened it with a jerk, and saw his father and his mother seated at table, face to face.

He approached her first without lifting his eyes, without saying a word, and, stooping down, presented his face for her to kiss, as he had done for some time, instead of kissing her cheeks as of old. He supposed

that her mouth approached him, but he did not feel her lips on his face, and he straightened himself, with a beating heart, after this *simulacrum* of a caress.

“What,” he was thinking, “did they say after I left?”

Jean said tenderly, over and over again, “mother,” and “dear mamma,” looked after her, supplied her wants, and poured out for her. Then Pierre understood that they had wept together, but he could not penetrate their thoughts. Did Jean think his mother guilty, or his brother a wretch?

And all the reproaches which he had heaped on himself for having revealed the horrible truth assailed him again; contracted his throat, and closed his mouth, preventing him from either eating or speaking.

Now he was attacked by an intolerable desire to flee away, to quit this house which was no longer his, these people who held him no longer, save by imperceptible bonds. And he would have liked to go at once, no matter where, feeling that all was over, that he could no longer remain with them, that he would be always torturing them in spite of himself, if only by his presence, and that they would make him suffer ceaselessly an insupportable torment.

Jean spoke, talking with M. Roland whilst Pierre did not listen—did not even hear. But he thought that he felt a significance in his brother's voice, and took note of the meaning of his words. Jean was saying :

“It will be, they say, the finest vessel in their fleet. They talk of six thousand five hundred tons. It will make its first voyage next month.”

Roland was astonished.

“So soon. I thought it would not be ready for sea this summer.”

“Oh, yes. They have pushed on the work so that the first voyage might take place before the autumn. I was at the office of the Company this morning, and talked with one of the managers.”

“So ! So ! Which of them ?”

“M. Marchand, the special friend of the chairman.”

“Why, do you know him ?”

“Yes, and then I had a little favour to ask him.”

“Ah, then you can get me taken over the *Lorraine* as soon as she comes into harbour, can't you?”

“Of course, that is soon done.”

Jean seemed to hesitate, as if thinking how to express himself, and attempting a difficult change of subject. He went on :

“No doubt about it, life on those great Transatlantic steamers is very enviable. More than half the month is spent on land, in two magnificent towns, New York and Havre, and the rest at sea, with charming people. Why, one can make in this way very agreeable acquaintances amongst the passengers, who will be useful later on—Yes, very useful. Just fancy! The captain, by economising coal, can make twenty-five thousand francs a year, if not more.

“*Bigre!*” said Roland; and he whistled, to show his profound respect for the sum and for the captain.

Jean continued :

“The steward can rise to ten thousand, and the doctor has five thousand francs regular salary, with lodgings, food, lights, coals, attendance, and so forth. That must mean ten thousand at least, which is a fair sum.”

Pierre, who had raised his eyes, met those of his brother, and understood him.

Then, after some hesitation, he asked :

“Are these surgeoncies very hard to get on a Transatlantic?”

“Yes—and no. All depends on circumstances and influence.”

There was a long silence. Then the doctor continued :

“The *Lorraine* leaves next month?”

“Yes, on the 7th.”

They were silent again.

Pierre was thinking. It would certainly be a solution, if he could go abroad as doctor on this steamer. After that—well, they would see. Perhaps he might give it up. Meanwhile he would be earning his livelihood without asking his family for anything. The night before, he had had to sell his watch, for he no longer held out his hand to his mother! Then he had no resources, when that was gone—no chance of

eating any food but that of the house he lived in, of sleeping in any other bed, under any other roof. And he said, with a little hesitation :

“ I would gladly go out in one of them if I could.”

“ Why can't you ?” Jean asked.

“ Because I know no one in the *Compagnie transatlantique*.”

Roland was astounded.

“ And what is to become of all your fine plans for making a fortune ?”

Pierre murmured :

“ There are times when you must be able to sacrifice everything, and renounce your best hopes. Besides, it is only an opening, a way of saving up a few thousand francs, so as to settle down afterwards.”

His father was convinced at once.

“ That is quite true. In two years you can lay by six or seven thousand, which, properly used, will go a long way. What do you think of it, Louise ?”

“ I think Pierre is right.

Roland cried :

“ Well I shall go and talk about it to M. Poulin, who is a great friend of mine. He is judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, and has to do with the affairs of the Company. There is M. Lenient also, the shipowner, who is intimate with one of the deputy-chairmen.”

Jean asked his brother :

“ Would you like me to try my luck with M. Marchand to-day ?”

“ Yes, I should be very glad.”

After thinking a few instants, Pierre went on :

“ The best way, after all, perhaps, would be to write to my professors of the School of Medicine, who used to think pretty well of me. They often send a very average sort of man on these steamers. Warm letters from Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache, and Borriquel would manage the thing out of hand, better than any doubtful introductions. It would suffice to present these letters through your friend, M. Marchand, to the Board.”

Jean was all approval.

“ Your idea is excellent, excellent !”

And he smiled, reassured, almost happy, and certain of success : for he was incapable of troubling himself for long at a time.

“ You will write to them to-day,” he said.

“ At once—immediately. I am going to do it now. I won’t have any coffee this morning ; I am too nervous.”

He rose and went out. Then Jean turned to his mother.

“ Now, mamma, what are you going to do ? ”

“ Nothing. I don’t know.”

“ Will you come with me to Madame Rosémilly’s ? ”

“ Oh—yes, if you like.”

“ You know it is indispensable that I should go to-day.”

“ Yes—yes ! That is true.”

“ How is that ? Indispensable ? ” asked Roland, who indeed was never wont to understand what was said before him.

“ Because I promised her to go there.”

“ Ah, very well ! That is another thing.”

And he began to fill his pipe, whilst mother and son went upstairs to get ready.

When they were in the street, Jean said to her :

“ Will you take my arm, mamma ? ”

He never used to offer it, for they were wont to walk side by side. She accepted it, and leaned upon him.

For some time they did not speak. Then he said :

“ You see that Pierre is quite willing to go away ! ”

“ Poor boy,” she murmured.

“ Why poor boy ? He will not be at all unhappy on the *Lorraine*.”

“ No, I know he will not. But I am thinking of so many things.”

Long time she thought, with bent head, keeping step with her son, then, with that strange voice which we sometimes put on to terminate a long and secret meditation :

“ Life is a wretched business. If for once you meet with a little sweetness out of it, you are wrong to abandon yourself to it, and you will pay for it later on.”

“Don’t speak of that, mamma!” he said, in a low tone.

“Could I help it? I am always thinking of it.”

“You will forget.”

She was silent again, then said, with deep regret in her voice: “Ah, how happy I might have been if I had married another man!”

For the moment her dislike for Roland was aroused. She cast upon his ugliness, his stupidity, his awkwardness, his dulness of wit, and the common appearance of his person, the whole responsibility for her fault and her unhappiness. It was to that, to the vulgarity of this man, that she owed the fact of her having deceived him, of having driven one of her sons to despair, and made to the other the most grievous confession which could draw blood from a mother’s heart.

“It is frightful,” she murmured, “for a young girl to marry a husband like mine.”

Jean made no answer. He was thinking of the man whose son he had hitherto supposed himself to be; and perhaps the confused idea which he had long entertained of the paternal mediocrity, the constant irony of his brother, the scornful indifference of other people, and even the disdain of the maid for Roland, had prepared his mind for his mother’s terrible confession. It cost him less on this account that he was another man’s son; and after the great shock of emotion the night before, if he had not experienced the same reactionary shock of rebellion, indignation, and anger which was felt by Madame Roland, it was because he had long unconsciously suffered by thinking himself the son of this mild old dullard.

They had reached Madame Rosémilly’s door. She lived in the Sainte-Adresse road, on the second story of a large building which belonged to her. From her windows one could see the whole roadstead of Havre.

When she saw Madame Roland, who was the first to enter, instead of holding out her hand as usual, she extended her arms and embraced her, for she divined the reason of her visit.

The furniture of the drawing-room, in stamped velvet, was always protected by coverings. The walls, covered with flowered paper, bore four engravings that had been bought by her first husband, the captain.



They represented sea-pieces and sentimental scenes. In the first was depicted a fisherman's wife, waving her handkerchief on the sea-shore, whilst the sail which bore her husband away from her was disappearing on the horizon. In the second, the same woman, kneeling on the same sea-shore, strained her arms as she gazed into the distance, under a sky charged with lightning, at her husband's ship, foundering in a sea of impossible waves. The other two pictures represented analogous scenes in a superior social rank. A fair young woman muses as she leans upon the rail of a departing steamer. She is gazing at the already distant coast, her eyes moist with tears and regrets.

Who is the man she has left behind her ?

Next, the same young woman, seated near a window which opens on the sea, has fainted in her chair. A letter has fallen from her lap to the carpet.

He is dead ; and she is in despair.

Visitors were generally moved and drawn by the commonplace sadness of these transparent and poetic subjects. They took them in at once, without explanation or inquiry and pitied the poor women, although they did not precisely know the source of grief in the case of the superior lady. But even this doubt heightened their imagination. She must have lost her betrothed. As soon as a visitor entered, his eye was irresistibly attracted by these four subjects, and held as by a sort of fascination. It left them only to return again, and to contemplate the four shades of expression in the two women, who were like enough to be sisters. From the clear, finished, careful drawing, in the style of a fashion plate, and from the glittering frame, there breathed a sense of propriety and exactitude which the rest of the furniture still further accentuated. The chairs were arranged in unvarying order, some against the walls, others round the centre table. The white and spotless curtains hung in folds so straight and regular that one longed to tumble them a little ; and not a grain of dust disfigured the glass shade in which the gilded clock in the style of the Empire—a globe carried by Atlas kneeling—seemed to be ripening like a melon in a frame.

As the two ladies sat down, they changed the position of their chairs.

“You have not been out to-day?” Madame Roland asked.

“No; I confess that I am rather tired.”

And she went over, as though to thank Jean and his mother for it, all the pleasure which she had received from the fishing.

“You must know,” she said, “that I ate my shrimps this morning. They were delicious. If you like, we will repeat that picnic some day or other.”

The young man interrupted :

“Before we begin a second, suppose we finish the first?”

“How do you mean? It seems to me that it is finished.”

“Oh, Madame, I too, caught a fish amongst those rocks of Saint-Jomin, which I should like to take home with me.”

She became innocent and mischievous.

“You? How so? What did you find?”

“A wife. And mamma and I have come to ask you if she has not changed her mind this morning.”

She began to smile.

“No, sir; I never change my mind.”

Then it was his turn to hold out to her his big hand, into which she let hers fall with a brisk and resolute movement. And he said :
“You will make it as soon as possible—will you not?”

“When you like.”

“In six weeks?”

“I have no opinion in the matter. What does my future mother-in-law think about it?”

Madame Roland replied with a rather melancholy smile :

“Oh, as for me, I think nothing. I simply thank you for having been willing to accept Jean, for you will make him very happy.”

“What is possible shall be done, mamma.”

A little moved, for the first time, Madame Rosémilly got up, and taking Madame Roland in her arms, gave her a long kiss, like a child; and under this novel caress a strong emotion swelled the sorrowing heart of the poor woman. She could not have said what had come over her;

it was sad and sweet at the same time. She had lost a son, a grown-up son; and in his place she had received a daughter, a grown-up daughter.

When they sat down face to face again, on their chairs, they took each other's hands, and remained in that way, looking at one another and smiling, whilst Jean seemed to be almost forgotten. They spoke of a number of things of which they had to think in connection with the approaching marriage. When all was decided and arranged, Madame Rosémilly seemed suddenly to bethink herself of a detail, and asked :

“ You have consulted M. Roland, have you not ? ”

The same blush all at once tinged the cheeks of mother and son. It was the mother who answered :

“ Oh, no, that is unnecessary.”

Then she hesitated, feeling that an explanation was called for; and she went on :

“ We are doing everything without telling him of it. It will be enough to inform him when it is decided.”

Madame Rosémilly smiled, in no way surprised, considering it very natural; for the worthy man counted for so little.

When Madame Roland was once more in the street with her son :

“ Suppose we go to your rooms,” she said; “ I want to rest.”

She felt herself without protection or refuge, being afraid of her home.

They went to Jean's; and as soon as she saw the door closed behind her she breathed a deep sigh, as if the lock had placed her in security. Then, instead of resting, as she had said, she began to open the cupboards, to count the piles of linen, and the number of handkerchiefs and socks. She changed their arrangements for others more to her mind, and more satisfactory to her housewifely instinct; and when she had disposed everything to her taste, ranged the towels, drawers, and shirts on the proper shelves, and divided all the linen into their main classes, of body linen, household linen, and table linen, she stepped back to look at her work, and said :

“ Jean, come here, and see how nice it is.”

He rose and admired it, in order to please her.

Suddenly, when he had sat down again, she approached his chair lightly from behind, and, taking him round the neck with her right arm, kissed him as she set on the mantel-piece something folded in white paper, which she had held in her other hand.

“What is that?” he asked.

Though she did not answer, he understood, for he recognized the shape of the frame.

“Give it to me,” he said.

But she pretended not to hear, and went back to her linen closets. He rose, eagerly seized the painful relic, and, crossing the room, went and locked it, with a double turn of the key, in a drawer of his desk. Then, with the tips of her fingers, she wiped a tear from her eye, and, faltering a little in her voice, said :

“Now I am going to see if your new maid looks after her kitchen properly. As she is out just now, I can inspect everything, and see for myself.”



IX



CHAPTER IX.

THE testimonials of Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusat, Flache, and Borriquel, written in very flattering terms on behalf of their pupil, Dr. Pierre Roland, had been submitted by M. Marchand to the Board of the *Compagnie transatlantique*, supported by MM. Poulin, judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, Lenient, a large shipowner, and Marival, deputy-mayor of Havre, the latter a special friend of Captain Beausire.

It happened that no doctor had yet been nominated to the *Lorraine*, and Pierre had the good luck to be appointed within a few days.

The letter announcing the fact was handed to him one morning by the maid Joséphine, as he finished dressing.

His first feeling was that of a man condemned to death, who is informed of a commutation of his sentence. He felt his trouble instantly relieved by the thought of the voyage and the calm existence—constantly

rocked by the rolling waves, constantly on the move, constantly fleeing from himself. At present he was living in his father's house like a silent and reserved stranger.

From that night on which he had allowed the wretched secret discovered by him to escape him in his brother's presence, he felt that he had broken the last links with his own people. Remorse for having told the thing to Jean harrowed him. He considered himself odious, unclean, wicked; and yet he was assuaged by having spoken.

Never again had he met the gaze of his mother or of his brother. In order to avoid each other their eyes had acquired a marvellous mobility, the shifts of enemies who fear to cross each other's path. He was always asking himself: "What could she have said to Jean? Did she confess or deny it? What does my brother believe? What does she—what does he think of me?" He could not guess, and it exasperated him. And he scarcely spoke to them now, except when Roland was present, that he might avoid being questioned by him.

When he had received the letter announcing his appointment, he showed it on the same day to his family. His father, who had a strong tendency to rejoice at everything, clapped his hands. Jean replied seriously, but with joy in his soul:

"I congratulate you with all my heart, for I know there were many candidates for it. You certainly owe that to the letters of your professors."

And his mother bent her head as she murmured:

"I am very glad you have succeeded."

After breakfast he went to the Company's office, to get information on a number of things, and he asked for the name of the doctor of the *Picardie*, which was leaving next morning, that he might learn from him all the details of his new life, and of the special duties which awaited him.

Dr. Pirette being on board, he went to him, and was received in a little cabin by a young man with a fair beard, not unlike his brother. They had a long talk together.

From the resonating depths of the immense vessel they heard a great bustle, confused and never ending, in which the descent of the cargo as

it was piled up in the hold was mingled with trampings, voices, the motion of the machinery filling the tanks, the whistling of the mates, and the sound of dragging chains, or of the cables as they were wound on the windlasses by the hoarse-sounding steam, which caused the whole bulk of the mighty ship to quiver.

But when Pierre had left his colleague, and was once more in the street, a new sadness fell upon him, and enfolded him as in one of those fogs which roam over the sea, sweeping from the ends of the world, and bearing something mysterious and impure in their intangible denseness, like the pestilential breath of a distant, malarious land.

In his hours of greatest pain he had never felt himself plunged in such a slough of wretchedness.

The reason was that the last rupture had been made; he had lost his last hold. When he tore from his heart the roots of every tender feeling, he had not suffered this misery, akin to that of a lost dog, which all at once laid hold on him.

It was no longer a moral and tormenting pain, but the madness of an animal without protection, the physical anguish of a wandering creature who has no home, and who is assailed by rain, wind, storm, and all the brutal forces of the world. When he set foot on this steamer and entered the little cabin, shung over the waves, the flesh of the man who had always slept in a still and quiet bed revolted from the precariousness of all his future life. Up to that time it had felt itself protected by solid walls, sunk into the tenacious earth, and by the certainty of rest in the self-same spot, under the wind-resisting roof. Now, all that one loved to defy in the warmth of a close-shut house would become a danger, and a constant cause of suffering.

There would be no more soil beneath his feet, but a rolling, roaring, and engulfing sea. No more space to walk, to run, to lose his way, but a few yards of planks to tramp on, like a condemned man amongst his fellow-prisoners. No more trees, gardens, streets, houses—nothing but water and clouds. And he would feel the ship constantly moving under his feet. On stormy days he would have to cling to the bulkhead, lay

hold of the doors, and fasten himself to his hammock, lest he should be thrown about. On calm days he would hear the panting quiver of the screw, and would feel the ship which carried him sweep on with continuous, regular, exasperating flight.

And now he was condemned to this life of a wandering galley-slave, simply because his mother had committed herself.

He walked on straight before him, giving way to the desolate melancholy of men resolved on exile.

He no longer felt in his heart that lofty scorn and disdainful hatred of the unknown people who passed him by, but a sad longing to speak to them, to tell them that he was going to leave France, to get himself listened to and consoled. There was within him the shamefaced need of a poor man who is ready to hold out his hand, a timid, yet strong desire to feel that some one would suffer by his departure.

He thought of Marowski. The old Pole was the only man who loved him enough to feel a true and deep emotion; and the doctor instantly decided to go and see him.

When he entered the shop, the dispenser, who was pounding some powder in a marble mortar, gave a little start and quitted his work.

"You are scarcely ever seen now," he said.

The young man explained that he had to do a great number of things, without saying what they were; and as he sat down he asked:

"Well, how are things going?"

Things were not going well. The competition was terrible, and sick men were rare, and poor in this working-man's quarter. Only cheap medicines could be sold here; and the doctors did not give those unusual and elaborate prescriptions on which one could make a profit of five hundred per cent. The good man ended by saying:

"If it goes on for another three months or so, I shall have to shut up shop. If I were not reckoning on you, my kind doctor, I should already have taken to blacking boots."

Pierre felt his heart contract, and he suddenly decided to strike his blow, since it had to be done:

“ Oh, as to me, I can no longer be of any use to you. I am leaving Havre at the beginning of next month.”

Marowsko took off his spectacles, he was so greatly moved :

“ You—— you—— What did you say ? ”

“ I say that I am going to leave, my poor friend.”

The old man was astounded, feeling his last hope crumble away; and he felt a sudden anger against this man whom he had followed, whom he loved, in whom he had so much confidence, and who was forsaking him in such a fashion.

He stammered out :

“ But you, too, are not going to betray me, are you ? ”

Pierre was so touched that he was ready to kiss him.

“ I am not betraying you. I have not been able to take a house here, and I am going as doctor on a Transatlantic steamer.”

“ Oh, Monsieur Pierre, you promised me so faithfully to help me to get a living ! ”

“ What can I do ? I must make a living myself. I have not a sou of my own.”

“ This is very bad,” said Marowsko. “ What you are doing is very bad. There is nothing left for me to do but to die of hunger. At my age, all is over. It is bad. You are abandoning a poor old man who came here to be with you. It is bad.”

Pierre tried to explain, to protest, to give reasons to prove that he could not have acted otherwise. The Pole would not listen, being enraged by the desertion; and he ended by saying, doubtless thinking of certain political events :

“ All you Frenchmen break your promises.”

Then Pierre rose, ruffled in his turn, and putting on an air of superiority said :

“ You are unjust, *père* Marowsko. Strong reasons were needed to make me do as I have done; and you ought to understand it. Good-bye. I hope you will be more reasonable the next time I see you.”

And so he went out.

"There!" he said; "nobody will have any sincere regret for me!"

He searched his thoughts, going over all the people he knew, or had known, and, amongst the faces which defiled before him in his memory, he came upon that of the barmaid who had caused him to suspect his mother. He hesitated, for he retained an instinctive bitterness against her; then, suddenly making up his mind, he said to himself:

"After all, she was in the right."

And he set out for the street where she lived.

The drinking-shop happened to be full of people, and full also of smoke.

The customers, who were tradespeople and workmen—for it was a holiday—were clamouring, laughing, crying out, and the landlord himself was serving, running from table to table, carrying away the empty glasses, and bringing back full ones.

When Pierre had discovered a seat not far from the bar, he waited, hoping that the girl would see and recognize him.

But she passed and repassed him, without a glance, tripping lightly beneath her skirts with a pretty sauciness.

At last he rapped on the table with a piece of money. She ran up:

"What shall I get you, sir?"

She was not looking at him, her mind being absorbed in the reckonings of the customers she had served.

"Well!" he said, "is that how we say good day to our friends?"

She fixed her eyes on him, and said in a hurried voice:

"Ah, it is you. Hope you're well; but I've no time to-day. Do you want a glass of beer?"

"Yes, a glass of beer."

When she brought it, he said:

"I have come to say good-bye. I am going away."

She answered, indifferently:

"Indeed! Where are you going?"

"To America."

"They say it's a fine country."

And that was all. He must surely have been very stupid to speak to her that day. There were too many people in the *café*.

And Pierre wandered down to the sea. When he reached the pier he saw the *Perle*, returning with his father and Captain Beausire. The sailor Papagris was rowing, and the two men, sitting in the stern, were smoking their pipes with an appearance of complete happiness. The doctor thought, as he watched them passing : "Blessed are the poor in spirit." And he seated himself on one of the seats of the breakwater, to try if he could lose himself in an animal sleep.

When he returned home in the evening, his mother said to him, without daring to raise her eyes to his face :

"You must have a number of things to do before you go, and I am in a little difficulty. I have just ordered your linen, and I have been to the tailor's about your coats ; but is there nothing else you need, things that I may not know of ?"

He parted his lips to say : "No, nothing." But he bethought himself that he must at least consent to be well-dressed ; and he answered very calmly :

"I really don't know yet ; I will enquire at the Company's office."

He did enquire, and received a list of indispensable articles. When his mother took it from him, she looked at him for the first time within many weeks ; and deep down in her eyes there was the humble, gentle, sad, and suppliant look of a poor beaten dog suing for pardon.

On the 1st of October the *Lorraine*, coming from Saint-Nazaire, entered the port of Havre, being timed to leave again on the 7th of the same month for New York ; and Pierre Roland was to take possession of the little cabin in which he was thenceforth to spend his life.

On the following morning, as he was going out, he met his mother on the stairs.

Madame Roland was waiting for him, and murmured, in a scarcely intelligible voice :

"Do you not want me to help you to settle down on board the ship ?"

"No, thank you. Everything is ready."

"I should so much like," she murmured, "to see your cabin."

"It is not worth while. It is very ugly and small."

He passed on, leaving her downcast, leaning against the wall, with blanched face.

Now Roland, who went over the *Lorraine* on the same day, could talk of nothing at dinner but this splendid ship, and was much astonished that his wife was not anxious to know all about it, since their son was to embark in it.

Pierre scarcely lived with his family during the days which followed. He was nervous, irritable, stern, and his brutal speech seemed to cast its lash over everybody. But on the eve of his departure he appeared all at once to be quite changed and softened. As he kissed his parents before going to sleep on board, he asked for the first time :

"You will come and bid me good-bye, on board ship, to-morrow?"

"Yes, of course we will!" cried Roland. "Won't we, Louise?"

"Certainly," she said, in a low voice.

Pierre went on :

"We leave at eleven, precisely. You must be there at half-past nine, at latest."

"Stay!" cried his father, "I have an idea. When we leave you we will make haste and put off in the *Perte*, so as to accompany you beyond the jetties, and see you again. Shall we, Louise?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"In that way," said Roland, "you will not lose us in the crowd which always covers the pier-head when the Transatlantics steam out. People on board can never tell their own friends. Do you like the idea?"

"Yes, I do. That is understood."

An hour later, he was stretched on his hammock, narrow and long, like a coffin. He lay there some time, with his eyes open, thinking of all that had happened in the last two months of his life, and especially within his own soul. By dint of suffering and making others suffer, his aggressive and vengeful grief was worn out, like a blunted blade. He had scarcely spirit enough remaining to bear a grudge against anybody.



or on any account, and he let his revolt vanish into thin air, as he felt his life slipping down the stream. He was so weary of strife, of dealing blows, of hating, of everything, that he could persevere no longer with it, and tried to steep his heart in forgetfulness, as one sinks into sleep. Vaguely he heard around his head the new sounds of the vessel, light and scarcely perceptible sounds, in this calm night in the harbour; and of his wound, hitherto so sore, he felt but the painful strainings of a healing scar.

He had fallen into a profound sleep when the movement of the sailors disturbed his rest. It was growing light, and the tidal train, bringing passengers from Paris, was drawing up on the quay.

Then he wandered over the ship amidst the busy, restless folk, looking for their cabins, exchanging greetings, questions, and answers off-hand, in the strangeness of the first hours of their journey. After he had paid his respects to the captain and shaken hands with his companion the *commissaire du bord*, he entered the saloon, where a few Englishmen were already asleep in the corners. The fine apartment, with walls of white marble enclosed in gilded mouldings, extended in the mirrors the perspective of its long tables, flanked with two endless rows of revolving seats, with their crimson cushions. That was the vast, floating, cosmopolitan hall where wealthy travellers of all continents were to take their meals together. Its costly luxury resembled that of the great hotels, theatres, and public places, the imposing and vulgar luxury which satisfies the eyes of millionaires.

The doctor was about to pass on into the part of the ship set aside for the second class, when he remembered that the night before a large company of emigrants had been taken on board, and he descended into the steerage cabin. As he made his way inside, he was greeted by a sickening odour of poor and unclean humanity, a smell more unpleasant than that of the hide or wool of animals. Then, in a sort of dark and low underground cave, like the galleries of a mine, Pierre perceived several hundred men, women, and children, extended on planks one above another, or grovelling in heaps on the floor. He could not dis-

tinguish faces, but dimly saw that squalid, tattered crowd, that crowd of wretched victims of existence, exhausted and crushed, departing with their lean wives and half-starved children for an unknown land, where they hoped that possibly they might not die of hunger.

And the doctor, as he thought of their past labour, their labour thrown away, their barren efforts, their desperate struggle, renewed every day to no purpose, and of the energy displayed by these poor wretches, who were going to begin again, without knowing where, this life of hateful misery, felt inclined to cry out to them : "Go and drown yourselves in the sea, with your mates and your little ones !" And his heart was so wrung with pity that he went away, unable to bear the sight of them.

His father, his mother, his brother, and Madame Rosémilly were already waiting for him in his cabin.

"So soon !" he said.

"Yes," Madame Roland answered, in tremulous tones, "we wanted to have time to see a little of you."

He looked at her. She was in black, as though she were wearing mourning, and he suddenly observed that her hair, which was grey a month ago, was now becoming quite white.

He had much difficulty in getting the four persons seated in his little apartment, and he himself leaped upon his bed. Through the door, which remained open, they could see a crowd as numerous as that of the streets on a holiday, for all the friends of the passengers and an army of mere sight-seers had invaded the immense steamer. They walked in the gangways, in the saloons, and everywhere, and heads were even thrust inside the cabin, whilst voices outside explained : "That is the doctor's crib."

Pierre pushed the door to ; but when he found himself shut in with his own people he felt inclined to open it again, for the bustle of the ship beguiled their awkwardness and silence.

At last Madame Rosémilly was good enough to speak.

"There is not much air through these little windows," she said.

"It is a *hublot*," Pierre replied, "a port-hole light."

He pointed out the thickness of the glass, which made it capable of

resisting the most violent shocks. Then, at considerable length, he explained the system by which it was closed.

Roland said :

“ You have your medicine-chest here ? ”

The doctor opened a cupboard and displayed a store of phials bearing Latin names on labels of white paper.

He took one out, and enumerated the properties of the drugs which composed it. A second followed, and then a third, and he gave them a regular course of therapeutics, to which they appeared to listen with great attention.

Roland kept on repeating, as he shook his head, that it was very interesting.

There was a gentle rap at the door.

“ Come in,” cried Pierre; and Captain Beausire made his appearance.

As he held out his hand he said : “ I am late, because I did not wish to embarrass the effusions.”

He also had to sit on the bed. Then silence fell again.

But suddenly the captain pricked up his ears. Certain orders reached him through the partition; and he announced :

“ It is time to go, if we mean to put off in the *Perle* and see you as you leave, so as to say good-bye out at sea.”

M. Roland was bent upon this, no doubt in order to make an impression on the *Lorraine's* passengers; and he jumped up at once.

“ Well then, good-bye, my boy.”

He kissed Pierre on his whiskers, and opened the door.

Madame Roland did not move, and remained with downcast eyes, and very pale.

Her husband touched her on the arm.

“ Come! Let us make haste! We have not a minute to lose.”

She rose, took a step towards her son, and offered him her cheeks, white as wax, which he kissed without uttering a word. Then he shook hands with Madame Rosémilly and his brother, asking the latter :

“ When is your marriage to be ? ”

"I am not quite sure yet. We will make it coincide with one of your return voyages."

At last every one left the cabin and went on deck, which was crowded by visitors, porters, luggage, and sailors.

The steam was puffing in the vast lungs of the ship, which seemed to be quivering with impatience.

"Good-bye," said Roland, in a hurry as usual.

"Good-bye," said Pierre, who was standing on one of the little wooden bridges which connected the *Lorraine* with the wharf.

He shook hands again all round, and his family departed.

"Get into the carriage! Quick, quick!" cried the old man.

A *fiacre* was waiting for them, and bore them to the tide-dock, where Papagris had the *Perle* in readiness to put off.

There was not a breath of air. It was one of those days, still autumn days, on which the polished sea looks cold and hard as steel.

Jean seized an oar, and the sailor took the other; and they began to row. On the breakwaters, the jetties, and even the granite coping, there was a dense, swaying, and noisy crowd waiting for the *Lorraine*.

The *Perle* passed between these two human waves, and was soon beyond the pier-head.

Captain Beausire was seated between the ladies, and guided the helm.

"You will find," he said, "that we shall precisely strike the track, precisely!"

And the oarsmen pulled hard, so as to get as far as possible. Suddenly Roland exclaimed:

"There she is! I can see her masts and funnels. She is just leaving the basin."

"Put it on, my lads!" Beausire kept repeating.

Madame Roland took out her handkerchief and held it to her eyes.

Roland was standing, glued to the mast, and recorded progress.

"Now she is making a turn in the outer harbour— She has stopped moving— She is moving again— She has had to take a tug— Now she's off! Hooray!— She has come out between the jetties! Just



hear the crowd shouting!—Hooray!—The *Neptune* is towing her—Now I can see her prow—There she is! there she is!—God's name, what a ship! Look at her, all of you!”

Madame Rosémilly and Beausire turned round; the two men ceased to row; Madame Roland alone did not move.

The immense steamer drawn by a powerful tug, which looked like a caterpillar in front of her, was slowly and majestically quitting the harbour. And the people of Havre, massed upon the pier-head, on the beach, at the windows, all at once carried away by a patriotic fervour, began to cry : “*Vive la Lorraine!*” cheering and applauding the splendid start, this birth of a grand ocean city, which bestowed on the sea the finest of her daughters.

But the ship, as soon as she had passed the narrow channel closed in between two walls of granite, feeling herself free at last, cut loose her tug, and went on her way alone, like an enormous creature racing over the waves.

“There she is! There she is!” Roland kept on. “She is bearing right down upon us!”

And Beausire joyfully repeated :

“What did I promise you, eh? Do I know their track?”

Jean said to his mother, in a low voice :

“Look, mamma; she is coming!”

Madame Roland uncovered her eyes, which were blinded by tears.

The *Lorraine* came on, steaming at full speed since she had left the harbour, under the fair sky, so clear and calm. Beausire, pointing his glass, cried :

“Now, look out! Monsieur Pierre is in the stern, standing alone, well in sight. Look out!”

High up like a mountain, rapid as a train, the vessel at length swept by the *Perte*, almost touching her.

And Madame Roland, quite overcome, madly strained her arms towards it, and she saw her son, her son Pierre, his braided cap on his head, waving towards her his farewell kisses with both hands.

But he was going away; he was fleeing from her; he gradually disappeared. He had grown diminutive, blurred, like an imperceptible speck on the mighty vessel. She strove to recognize him still, and could not distinguish him.

Jean had taken her hand.

“Did you see him?” he said.

“Yes, I saw him. How kind he is!”

They turned back towards the town.

“Jupiter! What a pace she puts on!” Roland exclaimed, with enthusiastic conviction.

Every second, indeed, the steamer grew smaller and smaller, as though it were sinking in the ocean. Madame Roland, keeping her eyes upon it, saw it plunge into the horizon towards an unknown land, on the other side of the world.

On that vessel, which nothing could arrest, on that vessel which in a minute she would see no longer, was her son, her poor son. And it seemed to her as though the half of her heart were going with him—seemed to her as though her own life were ended—seemed to her as though she would never see her child again.

“What are you crying for?” asked her husband. “He will be back in a month.”

“I don’t know,” she stammered. “I cry because I am ill.”

When they had landed, Beausire left them at once, to go to breakfast with a friend.

Then Jean went on in front with Madame Rosémilly, and Roland said to his wife :

“He is a fine-built fellow, don’t you know, our Jean!”

“Yes,” said the mother.

And she added, too disturbed in her mind to think of what she was saying :

“I am very glad that he is going to marry Madame Rosémilly.”

The good man was astounded.

“Go on! What do you mean? Marry Madame Rosémilly?”

"Yes, certainly. We were going to consult you this very day."

"What! What! Has this business been spoken of long?"

"Oh, dear no! Only a few days. Jean wanted to be sure of her consent before speaking to you."

Roland rubbed his hands.

"Capital! Capital! This is excellent! For my part, I perfectly approve."

As they were about to leave the quay, and pass into the Boulevard François Premier, his wife turned round once more, to cast a parting gaze upon the open sea; but all she could detect was a little streamer of gray smoke, so far away and so indistinct that it looked like a mist.



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